Life After Death
Resurrection, Judgment and the Final Destiny of the Soul

Volume 2

Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Husayni Tihrani

Translated, Annotated and Introduction by
Mohammad H. Faghfoory

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Belief in life after death gives meaning to life and illuminates the purpose of the creation of man. That is the reason it is one of the five fundamental pillars of Islamic tradition, without which other pillars become meaningless. The essential question, therefore, is what was the purpose of man's creation? Where will he go after death, and what is awaiting him there? The question of life after death and the uncertainty of what lies beyond have preoccupied man's mind since the beginning of creation. The 35 discourses in the second volume deal with fundamental metaphysical questions based on the Quran, the traditions of the Prophet, the narrations and sayings of the Shīʿa Imāms, and philosophical writings and mystical literature in Persian and Arabic, as well as the knowledge and experience of the author. These discourses complete one of the most important and authoritative books ever written on the subject of the human state from the moment of man's conception to the time when he meets his Lord.

Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Husayni Tihrani (1926-1995) was a respected intellectual, jurist, mystic and philosopher who trained and guided many students during his lifetime. He was an eloquent speaker and prolific writer, and left numerous books and treatises for later generations.

Muhammad H. Faghfoory is professor and director of the MA Program in Islamic Studies at the George Washington University where he teaches courses on Islam, Sufism, Islamic Art and Spirituality, Islamic Philosophy and Theology, Islamic Political Thought, and Shi'ite Islam and other related courses.

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Life after Death, Resurrection, Judgment, and the Final Destiny of the Soul

Studies in Islamic Eschatology

Volume II

*

‘Allāmah Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn Ḥusayni Ṭihrānī

Translated, annotated, and introduced

by

Mohammad H. Faghfoory
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Mohammad Reza Hemyari
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*

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Humbly dedicated to the blessed soul of
'Allāmah Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī

and

'Allāmah Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn Ḥusayni Ṭihrānī,
May God's mercy be upon their immaculate Souls.

Table of Transliteration
Of Arabic and Persian Characters

b = ب	**Z = ز**	**f = ف**
t = ت	**s = س**	**q = ق**
th = ث	**sh = ش**	**k = ك**
j = ج	**ṣ = ص**	**l = ل**
ḥ = ح	**ḍ = ض**	**m = م**
kh = خ	**ṭ = ط**	**n = ن**
d = د	**ẓ = ظ**	**h = ه**
dh = ذ	**‘ = ع**	**w = و**
r = ر	**gh = غ**	**y = ي**
		ه = ة
long vowels ا ā ي ī و ū	**short vowels** ـَ a ـِ i ـُ u	**diphthongs** وْ aw' ىّ يّ Iy (final form ī) ى ى ai (ay) وّ uww (final form ū)
Persian letters added to the Arabic alphabet	پ **p** چ **ch** ژ **zh** گ **g**	

Introduction

The text that is presented in the following pages is 35 discourses that constitute the second volume of 'Allāmah Ṭihrānī's monumental work on life after death and the journey of the soul after departure from this world.

As was explained in volume one, the collection was originally published in ten volumes jointly by Mashhad University Press and 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī Publishing House in Mashhad between 1361/1982 and 1389/2010. The 35 discourses in the second volume deal with fundamental metaphysical questions based on the Qur'an, the traditions of the Prophet, the narrations and sayings of the Shī'a Imāms, and philosophical writings and mystical literature in Persian and Arabic, as well as the knowledge and experience of the author. These discourses complete one of the most important and authoritative books ever written on the subject of the human state from the moment of man's conception to the time when he meets his Lord.

Detailed information about the life of 'Allāmah Ṭihrānī was presented in the introduction to the first volume and there is no need to repeat it here. It must be mentioned, however, that after over 22 years since his death, the original 10-volume book has gone through 10 editions and has been read widely by scholars and lay readers in Iran. Through his numerous books and treatises he left behind, Ṭihrānī's presence is still felt strongly in the intellectual and spiritual circles in Mashhad over two decades after his departure from this world.

Translation of a text of this caliber into a Western language is a demanding undertaking and an arduous task, especially if we take into consideration that the discourses were originally presented orally. Making the text translatable into English required a great deal of editing and summarizing. This task would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of several scholars and friends. I am eternally indebted for the support and encouragement of Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr and his encouragement to complete the second volume. Special thanks are due to my dear friend, Dr. Abbas

Lotfipour of Mashhad. Without his support this project would have been impossible to undertake.

In completing of the second volume I benefited immensely from the collaboration of two scholars and friends, Mohammad Reza Hemyari, my former graduate student and teaching assistant in the religion department at The George Washington University (2011–2013), and Dr. Hasan Akhlaq Hosseini, a visiting scholar at Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. I had to refine and make revisions and corrections in the text—sometimes extensively—due to the difficult nature and style of the text and especially the frequent use of technical terms. I am very grateful for their effort and assistance. Annotation and explanatory notes on the text is my own.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude and heartfelt appreciation to Ms. Abigail Tardiff, who read and thoroughly edited the second volume as well. I do appreciate her impressive accuracy, professionalism, and punctuality and am grateful for her constructive comments and her attention to detail. She made invaluable editorial suggestions and prepared the final version of the manuscript for publication.

Translations of Qur'anic verses in this book are taken from A. J. Arberry (*The Koran Interpreted*).[1] Occasionally I also consulted Marmaduke Pickthall's translation (*The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*).[2]

In translating technical terms I have benefited greatly from works of other scholars and have mentioned the original Arabic terms in parentheses whenever necessary. Transliteration of Arabic terms and names is done in accordance with the Table of Transliteration. Extensive annotations are supplied to provide information about individuals, events, places, and terms. None of the scholars and friends mentioned above, however, is

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[1] A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

2. Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, London, 1930, reprinted in Tehran, 1352/1973.

responsible for any errors or shortcomings in the translation of the text. The responsibility for all such errors is solely my own.

Wa-min Allāh al-tawfīq wa-'alayhil-taklān.
Mohammad H. Faghfoory
Washington, D.C.
September 15, 2017
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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Forty-First Discourse

The Opening of the Book of Man's Deeds and the Method of Its Dispersal

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *And every man —We have fastened to him his bird of omen upon his neck; and We shall bring forth for him, on the Day of Resurrection, a book he shall find spread wide open. "Read thy book! Thy soul suffices thee this day as a reckoner against thee."*[3]

One of the realms of the Day of Judgment is the realm of "dispersal of books," when each person's Book of Deeds is opened and dispersed to that person. The word "dispersal," *taṭāyur*, comes from the word *ṭā'ir* (flying bird). Regarding the above verse, *Majma' al-Bayān* presents the following interpretation:

What the verse means by *We have fastened upon the neck of every person...* are his good and evil actions that will be fastened, like a collar, upon his neck and will not separate from him. Indeed a person's act is said to be *his bird* as the Arabs would say: "His bird took to such-and-such a thing." It is also said, "His bird is his good and bad fortune," for that (the good and bad fortune) is what (according to old Arab custom) was augured from the bird. And it is said, "His bird is his fortune, whether it is of good or evil." And the neck is specified because that is the place of the collar and necklace that beautifies the good, and the chain that disgraces the evil-doer. And it is said, "His bird of omen is his book," which is said to mean, "We have made a proof against every man from his own self."

The term *taṭāyur* (dispersal of books) has various meanings, and we will mention some of these meanings [in the coming pages]. It could mean that a person's record of actions "will take flight." A person's actions are all fastened (indelibly) to his neck. Once those records are loosened (from him), they will

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[3] Qur'an, 17: 13–14

take flight, just as a bird, and fly away. They will either fly towards those who have attained proximity to God, towards those Companions of the Right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*), or towards the Companions of the Left (*aṣḥāb al-shimāl*).

On Judgment Day, each being has its own designated place. If a person's actions are like those who have attained proximity to God (*al-muqarrabūn*), then his actions will be associated with them. If his actions are like those of the Companions of the Right, then it will fly towards them. Similarly, if one's actions are of the same substance as those of the Companions of the Left, then it will fly towards them. Therefore, the "dispersal of the book of deed" is actually referring to a realm where all the records of actions will take flight and will each land in its proper place. Alternatively, it could also mean certain measures of that which is ordained [as his fate] and is given to man as a result of his deed. A bird is a metaphor for man's destiny, which he will reap according to his own actions. In Arab [popular] culture, they would use birds to tell a person's good and bad fortune. For example, they would say that it is a good omen if a crow walks from left to right, and the opposite would be simply disastrous. And they would be aware of such signs daily; when leaving the house, they would interpret these signs either positively or negatively. If on a particular day an owl perched on top of their house, they would understand it as an omen of death and destruction. Now, if it were a pigeon that perched on their house, it would be welcomed as a good omen of blessings and happiness to come. Good fortune was called *taf'aa'ul*, whereas bad fortune was named *tash'aaum*. Therefore "bird" is a metaphor for good or bad fortune. It denotes that a person's actions will necessarily accompany him, whether they are good or bad.

Of course these superstitions do not exist in Islam, because after all there is no truth whatsoever to such beliefs. The only thing that has such a causative connection is the soul. God will loosen whatever fortunes, whatever actions, and whatever consequences will reach a person according to the good or evil nature of his actions, all of which will necessarily accompany him

on Judgment Day. Then, God will open the book of one's action so that a man will fully observe all of his previously recorded actions.

The neck is the locus of rewards for both the virtuous and the evil: a virtuous person, deserving of a necklace that dazzles with jewels, wears it on his neck displaying its splendor; whereas a person deserving punishment wears a chain around his neck. God states that He will tie man's "bird of omen" to his neck, meaning that all of a person's actions will be recorded and coiled around his neck. Initially, each action will overlap with the previous action such that as we act in the world, the previous acts become forgotten and disappear. Just as those ancient scrolls the scribe would write, it will roll upon itself, concealing what was written before. When they want to read it, they will unfurl it as they go along; *And We shall bring forth for him, on the Day of Resurrection, a book he shall find spread wide open.*[4] In other words, God says that He will fasten upon man's neck his deeds, which will wrap around his neck as a scroll wraps around itself. Man will not be able to see his deeds, although they accompany him, and on Judgment Day, that scroll will be unwrapped, and God will say *Read thy book*! and see it for yourself; *Thy soul suffices thee this day as a reckoner against thee.*[5]

All this means that after a person is annihilated, he returns to God and subsists in Him. He then is referred to the world of his existence. He bears witness to and becomes conscious of all of his deeds, directly experiencing all of his character traits and habits, his mental faculties and intentions, throughout time and space. He sees everything from the very beginning of his birth until the moment of his death. And he witnesses this existentially, and yet does not believe how precisely they have all been recorded. Each act is indeed recorded existentially, meaning that the act itself is preserved [as it was in the world] and now he is reliving that act through his presential knowledge.

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[4] Qur'an. 17: 13–14

[5] Ibid.

Now he understands how precisely God has accounted for his actions. The Commander of the Faithful appealed to God,

> [That You forgive me] every evil act I have committed, those acts thou commandest the noble scribes to record and establish against me; those [scribes] charged with preserving what is from me; those whom, along with my own body, You have made witnesses against me. And You watched over me even beyond them, and were witness to what was hidden from them.[6]

Those angels record all of our deeds, whether they be hidden or apparent. There are some thoughts and intentions that remain so close to the heart and are so hidden and secret that even these angels cannot perceive them. Yet God does, because He *watched over me even beyond (those angels), and was witness to what was hidden from them.*[7]

God watched over, veiled, and protected me and those angels both. He was witness to those things that were hidden even from those watchful angels. *Upon the day when God shall raise them up all together, then He shall tell them what they did.*[8]

It is likely that we have committed many deeds, and intentions or thought have descended upon our heart or we have made false assumptions, all of which the passing of time has erased. Yet God through His dominion has existentially recorded and kept them veiled from the world. *No; that which they were concealing before has now appeared to them.*[9] And everything we used to conceal will be revealed and man will see it. In short, *Upon that day men shall issue in scatterings to see their works, and whoso has done an atom's weight of good shall see it* and *whoso has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it.*[10]

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[6] 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib, Komayl Prayer, as quoted in *Miṣbal-Mujtahid*, p. 587.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Qur'an, 58: 6
[9] Qur'an, 6: 28
[10] Qur'an, 99: 6–8

In this world graves receive deeds and they will reveal these deeds on Judgment Day. The Noble Qur'an has explained this day as the day that *They shall come forth from the tombs as if they were scattered grasshoppers...*[11] The Day of Judgment is the day when all the people will come out of their graves group by group but will be separated and their [book of] deeds will be presented to them individually so that each person can see the deeds that he/she had committed [in the world] even if it was an iota of a good or evil deed. They will crawl out of their graves and will scatter in the air like grasshoppers so that they may *see their works.*[12] In another verse we read that *God will count their deeds*, and *What they hide even from before...*[13]

When man sees his own deed as it is being committed by himself and witnesses existentially its truth, he cannot deny its existence or its reality. How could one deny one's own presential knowledge? Denying presential knowledge necessarily implies denying one's own existence. For a person will find himself in the midst of committing the deed and will existentially understand his state while committing that act through his presential knowledge. In this state one cannot lie to oneself and deny one's action. On the Day of Judgment man will existentially find his deeds in celestial form. *All shall have their degrees, according to what they have wrought, and that He may pay them (tawfiyah) in full for their works, and they not being wronged.*[14]

The term *tawfiyah* means to fully repay that which belongs to a person. Here "payment" is used in the same way a person would repay a debt without any deficit, even in the slightest. Now, the Qur'anic injunction *pay them in full for their works*[15] means that they will be paid in this same way on Judgment Day. They will present them with one hundred percent of their

[11] Qur'an, 54: 7
[12] Qur'an, 99: 6–8
[13] Qur'an, 5: 28
[14] Qur'an, 49: 19
[15] Qur'an, 46: 19

works. *And they not being wronged...*[16] because one's willful deed itself will be shown in its celestial form. "Injustice" will not mean anything in this position, because [on that day] *No soul laden bears the load of another...*[17] Each person will bear his own load and he will be paid in full for his actions, *But how will it be, when We gather them for a day whereon is no doubt, and every soul shall be paid in full what it has earned, and they shall not be wronged?*[18]

Our actions will be recorded precisely, just like when we record on a cassette tape, except that it is a celestial Book of Deeds. It exists such that we may not be able to see it until after death. It will continue to record while we are in this world and will be replayed on Judgment Day so that we may see the results of our actions. The furling of a scroll is simply a precursor for it to be preserved and unfurled at a later time. Otherwise that preservation is in vain. It will be recorded in this world and will be reopened on Judgment Day. So we should do whatever good deed we can in this world, because tomorrow Judgment Day will come and no other action will be added to that record. On that Day, regret will not avail you, for the path of return will be closed and *Upon that day man will remember; and how shall the Reminder be for him*?[19] On Judgment Day, no reminder will have any benefit. We must reflect now. Reminders and reflections are important in this world, which gives us a place and time for preparing ourselves and acting on that preparation. "Today is for deeds without reckoning, whereas tomorrow is the reckoning without any deeds."[20] Indeed, on that Day each person will see his own actions. And all the different groups and parties, the different classes and individuals who used to rule over the world and dominate it with their selfish desires, will be brought to their knees in shame. *And thou shalt see every nation hobbling on their knees, every nation being*

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[16] Qur'an, 46: 19
[17] Qur'an, 35: 18
[18] Qur'an, 3: 25
[19] Qur'an, 89: 23
[20] 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib, "On Piety" as quoted in Ibn Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd wa'l-Raqa'iq*.

summoned unto its Book: "Today you shall be recompensed for that you were doing. This is Our Book, that speaks against you the truth; We have been registering all that you were doing."[21]

What reality is greater than one's act itself, which will be presented to that person? *This is Our Book that speaks against you the truth.* Our way is to record and reproduce your actions consistently. Everything that found existentiation and entered the Engendered Book will be preserved; hence every person's actions will also be preserved and will be reproduced in their entirety in that world and will be presented to their perpetrator. We will be shown those actions in their celestial reality, the form of those actions that are present in the Guarded Tablet. This tablet holds the complete reality of all the existent realms, both the material and celestial realms, the latter being the realm that *neither returns nor changes.* Because once it is, it is impossible for it to not be, because it already is. Once it enters existence, it is impossible for it to not exist while simultaneously existing. Thus God will extract that version of our deeds that is contained in the Guarded Tablet (*Lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*). Having given you dominion over that deed, He will say, "This is your act. So bear witness!"

It has been narrated from Imām Ṣādiq regarding the Guarded Tablet that

> It is a created Book within which exist all registers... And that is what He, the Almighty refers to (in the following verse), *We have been registering all that you were doing.*[22] Yes, this book is true and real because it contains the deed itself.[23] *The day every soul shall find what it has done of good brought forward...*[24]

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[21] Qur'an, 45: 28–29
[22] Qur'an, 45: 29
[23] Allāmah S. M. H. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Ma'ād*, chapter on "*al-Insān ba'd al-dunyā*," p. 35
[24] Qur'an, 3: 30

In the Qur'anic Commentary written by 'Ayyāshī (*Tafsīr 'Ayyāshī*), there is a narration related from Imām Ṣādiq on the authority of Khālid ibn Najīh, which states, "The Imām said: 'When Judgment Day arrives, every person's book will open and he will be told to "Read!"'"

The narrator said, "I asked, 'and does he know what is within that book?'"

The Imām replied, "Indeed God will remind him. For there is no moment nor word, no movement of feet, nor thing committed except that he will remember, as though he had committed (that act) in that very moment. And therefore they say, 'Alas for us! How is it with this Book, that it leaves nothing behind, small or great, but it has numbered it?'"[25]

'Ayyāshī added that "It was as though the Imām was witnessing Judgment Day at that very moment and describing for us the conditions of those people as if they were committing those acts at that very moment. Indeed, this was a miracle (of the Imām)."

If a man did any good work and its effects continued after his death, or committed any evil deed that he left behind, it will be added to his record. On the Day of Judgment he will wonder where this recompense came from. He will be told that this reward was for that book he wrote, or a student he trained and taught faith, or that sanctuary he built for the poor, or that other donation he gave away, the benefits of which will continue for all people and believers until the Day of Judgment.

There is a narration related to Imām Bāqir, which is in fact a commentary on the following verse of the Qur'an, *Upon that day man shall be told his former deeds and his latter...*[26] The Imām states:

> [On the Day of Judgment] man becomes aware of all his good or evil deeds, that which he sent [before death] and that which he sent [after death]. And "his latter deeds" are those which he left as a tradition that those who come after

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[25] *Taafsīr 'Ayyāshi*, vol. I, p. 284

[26] Qur'an, 75: 13

> him continue as their tradition. If they were evil deeds, it will be [an additional] burden [for him], and nothing will be reduced from his burden. And if they were good deeds, he will be rewarded to an equal amount, and nothing will be reduced from his reward.

In another tradition, it is said, "When the son of Adam dies, his connections to his deeds will all be discontinued except in three cases: a righteous son who would pray for his father, knowledge that others would benefit from, and a continual charity (*ṣadaqah jāriyah*) that he left behind and from which all people benefit." Indeed, "He who establishes a good tradition will gain the reward of him who acts upon that tradition; and he who establishes an evil tradition will gain the burden of him who acts upon that tradition." This is a universal rule according to which whoever sets the foundations for some act will be responsible for whatever others do based on the foundation he established. Nothing of his reward or torment will be lost, because they are ultimately the results of his deeds. *Surely it is We who bring the dead to life and write down what they have forwarded and what they have left behind; everything We have numbered in a clear register.*[27]

The "Clear Book" and the "Clear Guide" are indeed that same Guarded Tablet or *Mother of the Books* that is the existent world from which nothing can be hidden. The ultimate source of this Tablet that is a *copy* of the world of existence is indeed the Guarded Tablet, and the reality of that World of Being is the *Mother of the Books*. In other words, the Guarded Tablet is a copy of the *Mother of the Books.* This is the book that man's deeds are recorded in and are counted [on Judgment Day]. This is that what is called the "Divine counting of deeds." Any being that finds existentiation in the *Mother of the Books* necessarily exists thereafter and cannot cease to exist.

Every individual has a tablet of his own that is his Book of Deeds. This is what God refers to in the above verse, *This is*

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[27] Qur'an, 36: 12

In the Qur'anic Commentary written by 'Ayyāshī (*Tafsīr 'Ayyāshī*), there is a narration related from Imām Ṣādiq on the authority of Khālid ibn Najīh, which states, "The Imām said: 'When Judgment Day arrives, every person's book will open and he will be told to "Read!"'"

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There is a narration related to Imām Bāqir, which is in fact a commentary on the following verse of the Qur'an, *Upon that day man shall be told his former deeds and his latter...*[26] The Imām states:

> [On the Day of Judgment] man becomes aware of all his good or evil deeds, that which he sent [before death] and that which he sent [after death]. And "his latter deeds" are those which he left as a tradition that those who come after

[25] *Taafsīr 'Ayyāshi*, vol. I, p. 284
[26] Qur'an, 75: 13

> him continue as their tradition. If they were evil deeds, it will be [an additional] burden [for him], and nothing will be reduced from his burden. And if they were good deeds, he will be rewarded to an equal amount, and nothing will be reduced from his reward.

In another tradition, it is said, "When the son of Adam dies, his connections to his deeds will all be discontinued except in three cases: a righteous son who would pray for his father, knowledge that others would benefit from, and a continual charity (*ṣadaqah jāriyah*) that he left behind and from which all people benefit." Indeed, "He who establishes a good tradition will gain the reward of him who acts upon that tradition; and he who establishes an evil tradition will gain the burden of him who acts upon that tradition." This is a universal rule according to which whoever sets the foundations for some act will be responsible for whatever others do based on the foundation he established. Nothing of his reward or torment will be lost, because they are ultimately the results of his deeds. *Surely it is We who bring the dead to life and write down what they have forwarded and what they have left behind; everything We have numbered in a clear register.*[27]

The "Clear Book" and the "Clear Guide" are indeed that same Guarded Tablet or *Mother of the Books* that is the existent world from which nothing can be hidden. The ultimate source of this Tablet that is a *copy* of the world of existence is indeed the Guarded Tablet, and the reality of that World of Being is the *Mother of the Books*. In other words, the Guarded Tablet is a copy of the *Mother of the Books*. This is the book that man's deeds are recorded in and are counted [on Judgment Day]. This is that what is called the "Divine counting of deeds." Any being that finds existentiation in the *Mother of the Books* necessarily exists thereafter and cannot cease to exist.

Every individual has a tablet of his own that is his Book of Deeds. This is what God refers to in the above verse, *This is*

[27] Qur'an, 36: 12

Our Book that speaks against you the truth..."[28] These are the same particular tablets of each individual about which it is said *the earth shall shine with the light of its Lord, and the Book shall be set in place.*[29]

In short, the Guarded Tablet, the Clear Book, and the Clear Guide are various stages of the manifestations of the *Mother of the Book.* The Guarded Tablet is the Written Word of God. A word is like a mirror that speaks of the inner reality of things. Every being that *speaks* of the Divine is, in a sense, the word and signs of God's power (*āyāt*). In other words, all beings are the words of God. And the *Mother of the Books* that is composed of all these words is the Clear Book and the Clear Guide.

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[28] Qur'an, 45: 29

[29] Qur'an, 39: 69

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Forty-Second Discourse

The Book of Man's Deeds: Dispersal from Left or Right

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *Surely it is We who bring the dead to life and write down what they have forwarded and what they have left behind; everything We have numbered in a clear register.*[30]

Will the record of deeds arrive from the right or the left?

This verse, in referring to Judgment Day, states that God is not just concerned with reviving the dead; rather [He] also accounts for your actions and their consequences. Any "thing" that can be called such, whether it be actions or artifacts of those actions, will be accounted for in the *īmām al-mubīn* (the Clear Register), in all their particularities, and all their qualitative and quantitative attributes.

Now, there are some other Qur'anic verses according to which in one of the stages of Judgment Day, named the Abode of Exposition (*'ālam-i 'arḍ*), the records of some people will be given to them on the right, while others will receive their deeds on the left: *On that day you shall be exposed, not one secret of yours concealed. Then as for him who is given his book in his right hand, he shall say, "Here, take and read my book! Certainly I thought that I should encounter my reckoning." So he shall be in a pleasing life, in a lofty Garden, its clusters nigh to gather. Eat and drink with wholesome appetite for that you did long ago, in the days gone by. But as for him who is given his book in his left hand, he shall say, "Would that I had not been given my book and not known my reckoning! Would it had been the end! My wealth has not availed me, my authority is gone from me."*[31]

And the verses continue, stating the punishment meted out to the rebellious and ignoble. They illustrate for us how bleak

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[30] Qur'an, 36: 12

[31] Qur'an, 69: 18–29

their state will be on that Day, a condition that we must now reflect on and take heed. We must ask, what exactly do these verses mean when they refer to the "right" and the "left"?

In the Arabic language, the right and the left can either signify the stronger and weaker sides of a person—it can associate this figurative meaning with the actual right and left hands, respectively; or it can metaphorically signify a path of good fortune and felicity or ill fate and wretchedness. And although all of these are possible meanings of the two words, these verses are clearly referring to the last two possibilities, namely good fortune and felicity (and those who will enjoy them), or ill fate and wretchedness (for those who will suffer). Indeed, since in Arab divination practices, the "right" was seen as being a good omen, whereas the left portended evil to come, God uses these two symbols of "the right and the left" as metaphors for the good and the evil, respectively. Each individual's record of deeds will either be presented to him "on the right," portending a good fate: it will reach him with signs of peace, mercy, and compassion; or, it will be forced "upon his left," boding evil and portending his future wretchedness and misery. However, many exegetes understood and interpreted these verses more literally, stating that each individual will be handed his record either to his *right hand*, if he is blessed and will enter Paradise; or to his *left*, if he is doomed to suffer in Hell.

This interpretation is flawed for a number of reasons. Firstly, as was mentioned in previous discourses, each person's record is not a physical book that can be grasped by the hand; rather they are realities of that person's actions. A person attains such dominion over his own actions after having been annihilated in the Divine, thereafter persisting and attaining dominion over multiplicity. At this stage, he is conscious of his being in its entirety, whether it be in terms of his outward or more inward acts, along with all their various dimensions and particularities. Moreover, he becomes existentially aware of his *self* that was performing that act. This is the same awareness that one has of one's own acts through *presential* knowledge,

(*'ilm al-huḍūrī*) which was mentioned previously in the discussion on *tawfiyah*.[32]

Secondly, with regard to the preposition used in the verse "Then as for him who is given his book in his right hand...": The *bā* here refers to causation. It is the preposition of cause, referring to the record as being given because of the *yamīn*. The preposition *lām* is not used here. It does not say *li-yamīnihī*; here the *lām* would have meant a literal giving to the right hand (therefore it cannot be understood literally). Thus, the verse is stating, "We will give them their records that portend good," or in another verse, "We will give them their records that portend evil," meaning through either of these two (a good or evil fate).

Thirdly, in other verses, it states that instead of receiving their records from the left, they will receive from behind their backs. For example, this verse: *Then as for him who is given his book in his right hand, he shall surely receive an easy reckoning and he will return to his family joyfully. But as for he who is given his record behind his back, he shall call for destruction and he shall roast at a Blaze.*[33]

Clearly, what can be understood from these verses is the same as that of chapter 69 (*al-Ḥāqqa*) that was previously mentioned, such that only the word *shimāl* (the left) has been replaced with the phrase, *warā' ẓahrihī*, meaning from behind one's back. This is used as a metaphor for ill-fatedness and damnation, while also signifying a person who lacks a certain insight of truth, a certain blindness of his inner eye that prevents him from grasping reality. In various other verses, it is mentioned that on the Day of Judgment, the people will flock to their various leaders and will hence be associated with them, following them to either Heaven or Hell.

In this regard, the Qur'an states, *On the day when We shall call all men with their record, and whoso is given his book in his right hand—those shall read their book, and they shall not be wronged a single date-thread. And whosoever is blind in*

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[32] See the Forty-Second Discourse

[33] Qur'an, 84: 7–12

this world shall be blind in the world to come, and he shall be even further astray from the way.[34]

[As we notice] in these verses too, instead of referring to him *who is given his book in his left hand...* it states, *And whosoever is blind in this world shall be blind in the world to come, and he shall be even further astray from the way*, meaning that the "left" (*shimāl*) actually refers to that ill-fatedness, that inward blindness and damnation that they will suffer, and that is contrasted to the *yamīn.* This contrasting of the blind on the Day of Judgment to those who receive their deeds on the *right hand* defines this latter group as those illumined souls who have that particular insight into the reality of both this world and its inner reality, namely, the Hereafter. This is in contrast to the People of the Left, who, being devoid of that light, live in utter blindness.

Of course, in this world, which is the abode of multiplicity and contingency, we only perceive each person's outer appearance. People appear indistinct, and yet they each have an entirely distinct inner reality, which sets them apart and distinguishes them from one another, and each category has a guide (Imām) that corresponds to that inner reality. On the Day of Judgment, each group will be called by means of their particular Imāms, *On the Day when we shall call all men with their imām.* The blessed then will actually receive their records of deeds through their Imām of felicity, whereas the wretched receive their records through and by means of their ill-fated leaders.

Thus the leader of the righteous is himself righteous and truthful. He is himself of the *yamīn*, just as the leader of the evil is himself evil and of the *shimāl*, a metaphor for his wretchedness. Each of these leaders is in reality the means by which his particular groups are called and invited—hence the goodly are called by their leaders and the evil by theirs. Therefore, the second part of this verse clarifies what precedes it, namely that the righteous will be invited to their eternal blessedness by means of their righteous leaders and the evil will be condemned

[34] Qur'an, 17: 71–72

to their eternal wretchedness through their evil guides. Why? Because the leaders of the People of the Right are themselves among the blessed and possess that inner light; whereas the leaders of the wretched are themselves blind and devoid of that guiding light. Indeed, the leaders function as poles that attract those who are of similar natures; as Rūmī said,

> Every particle that exists on the earth and in Heaven
> is like a magnet that attracts its own type
> O knower of divine mysteries
> accept and give protection to this subtle divine attraction.[35]

Here is where the Qur'an states the leaders of the believers are the guiding lights of those believers such that on the Day of Judgment they proceed in front of the believers and by their right sides, guiding them to the heavenly gates: *Upon the day when thou seest the believers, men and women, their light running before them, and on their right hands. "Good tidings for you today!" Gardens underneath which rivers flow, therein to dwell for ever; that is indeed the mighty triumph.*[36]

The verses that follow speak of the hypocrites, asking the believers for some of that guiding light they possess. Yet they will be denied, for they are immersed in *the shadows piled one upon another.* [37]

The Qur'an also tells us in chapter 56 of the righteous, of the possessors of good fortune who are contrasted to the wretched, those who are at times described as the Companions of the Left (*aṣḥāb al-mash'amah*).[38]

This phrase refers to the companions of evil and wretchedness, who are at times referred to as those who lie and are misguided: *and if he be a Companion of the Right: "Peace be upon thee, Companion of the Right!" But if he be of them that cried*

[35] Rumi, *Mathnavi*, VI: 601
[36] Qur'an, 57: 12
[37] Qur'an, 57: 13
[38] Qur'an, 56: 9

lies, and went astray, there shall be a hospitality of boiling water and the roasting in Hell.[39]

A liar is one who possesses intellect and understands, and yet he denies [that reality]; whereas a misguided person is simply lost and leaves no effect in that world of the truth. This person never enters into the abode of light, for he possesses no light and hence does not have an illumined existence. Thus the liars, the misguided, those of the "left," all comprise a single category. This is a group that can in no way be manifested in the realm where only truth is manifest. They perpetuate in the realm of [satanic] conjecture and thoughts, and are lost in their sea of carnal whims and desires. They will die and be buried where they stand. This is entirely akin to how they spent their lives [in this world] preoccupied with gathering wealth and relying upon their accomplices, power, and status, and all the various contingencies and false hopes they held dear. Yet these contingences have no place in the realm of truth; the false cannot truly exist in the abode of the truth. Thus the people of falsehood will be lost when that time comes and will readily admit that their hoarded wealth will not avail them there, and their might and power will become naught.

Indeed the entire being of the true Imām is satiated with the truth, as are his followers who truly obey him both inwardly and outwardly. What is meant by the "inward" is the heart, which is the inner treasure of one's existence; and what is meant by the "outward" is one's character, mental attitude, and actions and behavior in relation with God. For the believer, all of these are with God, all these sides have been saturated, indeed immersed in the light of the Truth. The true Imām leads by justice and righteousness, with honor and sincere belief; such a leader is oriented towards God Almighty and the realms of light. The Imāms and their sacred souls are pure light, and light emanates from their being, and believers follow them in every step. Having attained that light, they become part of it. We have many narrations that denote that if a person does such-and-such acts, he will be associated with the Prophet and the

[39] Qur'an, 56: 90–94

Imāms and will become their companions. These narrations make sense when viewed through this perspective, because in the abode of union (*'ālam-i luḥūq*) there is permanent joining with respect to the Divine and essential witness (*ma'iyya*), hence absolute unity. Similarly and according to this perspective, the leaders of injustice, the pharaohs, and the unjust rulers, will all be gathered and united with their own followers and will enter the fires of Hell together. *That God may distinguish the corrupt from the good, and place the corrupt one upon another, and so heap them up all together, and put them in Gehenna; those are the losers.*[40]

Thus, the leader of injustice will lead and function as the guidepost for his followers, and it is he who will bear upon his followers the chronicles of their actions. *He shall go before his people on the Day of Resurrection, and will have led them down to the Fire-evil.*[41]

So then what does it mean for those same chronicles to be given to them from behind them? Why does it specify their "backs"? There is a verse in chapter four, where it is said, *You who have been given the Book, believe in what We have sent down, confirming what is with you, before We obliterate faces, and turn them upon their backs...* The word *maṭmūs* here means a thing that is crushed and is obliterated. It means we will obliterate their faces just as a shriveled piece of paper. Thereafter we will turn their faces towards their backs. Both these wicked Imāms and their followers will have their bodies facing forward while their heads are turned backward. And because of this, while their bodies are facing their Imāms, their heads will not be. Thus while the chronicles of their actions will be handed to them from their Imāms and they will be turned towards them, they will also be receiving their chronicles from behind [their heads].

The realms of truth and light move forward toward detachment and incorporeality, moving inevitably towards the realms of Divine blessings and mercy, toward that proximity to and

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40 Qur'an, 38: 37

41 Qur'an, 11: 98

status with the Divine. They move towards the unbounded realm and the world of infinitude, the realm that is not relative to or qualified by anything, that realm of the Divine Essence. Yet the realm of desire, appetite, and wrath and illusion, which are by definition the necessary components of the material and natural realms, is by its very nature the realm of darkness due to its gross nature. Thus it moves backwards. Those people who are attached to this realm, although they may seem to be progressing forward, in reality are not; their heads are set backward [their eyes are fixed on what is behind], for they seek that which is material and all that emerges from the material.

The people cherish contingencies and become preoccupied with the unreal, but their journey toward death, and the realm of detachment, and ultimately to God, is involuntary. The passing of time and nearing of death moves man toward God, whether he likes it or not, Man gets closer to God every moment. And although inwardly he looks towards this world, yearning to reside herein perpetually, his soul moves ever closer to God. In effect, on the Day of Judgment, which is the inner reality of this very world, and is *the day that all secrets shall be revealed*, this very reality will manifest itself, and the soul will be moving towards God—while heads will be turned towards the world. Whether we want to or not, we will inevitably move towards Him.

The People of the Left (*aṣḥāb al-shimāl*), those who lie, will have full consciousness and dominion over their actions. They will feel a profound sense of shame and contempt for themselves and their actions as they gaze upon them and for their own blindness and dishonor.

They will feel this existentially, because they will join their misguided leaders and will thus receive their chronicles on the "left," boding that evil fate. The People of the Right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*) are true believers and people of good deeds, who will unite with their own leaders (*imām al-mubīn*) in the realm of light. All their actions are in reality recorded and exist in the Engendered (*takwīnī*) Book, which is that Clear Register as

stated in the verse, *everything We have numbered in a clear register.*[42]

That "Clear Register," in a sense, is taken from the very same Engendered Book that is the true reality of this world. The outward manifestation of this Engendered Book is the existent beings of this world, and their spirits are displayed in that book of inner realities. Now the spiritual reality of that Book is the clear Imām (*imām al-mubīn*), which is the station of *wilāyah*. *Wilāyah*, then, is the true inner reality of all beings, but in their detached and simple (*basīṭ*) form. According to this argument, then, the Imām is the true reality of all the realms God has created. He is the meaning of the Universal Beautiful Names of God. With this, the Imām is the true reality of all beings in the engendered world. Since the entire universe is the dominion of the Imām, he registers each and every action we commit. Hence we must be absolutely careful to refrain from even the slightest sins that we may commit. There is a tradition from Imām Ṣādiq that states,

> The Prophet, peace be upon him and his progeny, came upon a barren land with his companions. He said to his companions, "Fetch some wood." They responded, "O Messenger, we are in a barren land. There is no wood here." He said, "Then let each man bring what he can." Every man brought something, until some began to bring to him whatever they could find. The Messenger then said, "Sins are also gathered in this way. Be forewarned of the sins that make you reviled. For indeed all things are coveted and indeed each person that covets will record that which he presented and that which is an effect (of what you presented). For indeed 'everything we have numbered in a clear register.'"[43]

The above discussion was about the chronicling of each person's deeds. With regard to the station of *wilāyah*, i.e., the station of the Imām, which is the spirit that breathes life into

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[42] Qur'an, 36: 12

[43] *Tafsīr Burhān* (Lithograph edition), 2: 886

this world, there is a *ḥadīth* in *Tafsīr al-Burhān* that is quite incredible, and deserves particular attention:

> Abū Dharr [Ghifārī] has narrated that "Once I was traveling in the wake of the Commander of the Faithful when we came upon a valley. And in this valley were a sea of ants moving about. I was in utter awe of this sight. I exclaimed, 'God is great! How magnificent He must be to be able to enumerate even this sea of ants.' Imām 'Ali, peace be upon him, replied, "Do not say that; rather say, 'God is magnificent for creating it.' For by Him who has created you, if God permits, I can enumerate them, and can even tell you of the number of male and female ants among them."

There is a similar *ḥadīth* by 'Ammār ibn Yāsir, who states,

> I was with Imām 'Ali during a war campaign, when we passed by a large valley filled with ants. I exclaimed, "O Commander of the Faithful. Do you know of any among God's creation who knows how many ants there are here?" He replied, "Yes, O 'Ammār! I know a man who knows not only their number, but how many male and female ants there are here." I responded, "O Master, who is that man?" He said, "O 'Ammār! Have you not read in Surah Yāsīn (36) where it states that 'All things are enumerated in the clear register'?" I said, "Yes, of course." He replied, "I am that clear register."[44]

Many other such narrations are listed in this section of *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, which state that the Clear Register is in reality the Commander of the Faithful. And in another *ḥadīth* by Mufadhdhal, it is equated with the five infallibles, the People of the Cloak. We can gather from these narrations that the Clear Register referred to in this verse is all the Infallible Imāms. The fact that the Imāms are aware of all the various realms of existence is because of their supervailing mastery (*wilāyah*), which is none other than absolute servanthood to God. Their station of proximity to the Divine Essence is such that there is

[44] *Tafsīr Burhān* (Lithograph edition), 2: 886

no separation or distance between them and that Essence. Whosoever attains this station will possess dominion, both in terms of knowledge and real dominion over all the realms of existence. Indeed the world is as a body and the Imām its spirit: he is the wisdom, knowledge, and sense of perception of this body. He serves as a witness to all of man's actions. He is that Clear Register that documents all of those deeds, that Universal Divine Word within whom God has placed all things. Ibn Fāriḍ explains this reality in his poetry in a most profound way.[45]

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[45] See Ibn Fāriḍ, *Dīwān*, pp. 77.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Forty-Third Discourse

The Clear Register, the Chronicle of Existence, and Its Instantiations

God, the All-Wise, has stated in His Noble Book, *Surely it is We who bring the dead to life and write down what they have forwarded and what they have left behind; everything We have numbered in a clear register.*[46]

It was said previously that just as the human being has a body and a soul, and just as his soul holds dominion and reigns over the body, the various existent realms are also comprised of a body and a soul. Indeed the body and soul of a man is a microcosm of that cosmic body and soul. And just as our souls in reality affect our will, decisions, and actions, similarly, changes and occurrences that manifest in this world are simply the effects and reflections of the universal soul and its will and decisions, as it dominates and reigns over this world.

That universal soul that holds dominion over this world is called the clear Imām. This Imām, coupled with the existent world, that palace of creation, the higher as well as the lower spiritual realms, are together named "the Clear Scroll." It is called a "scroll" because it contains all the "words" of creation that are the keys to all the Divine secrets, all the mysteries that He safeguards. Just as a book reveals the secrets and inner depths of an author's mind, this world removes the veil that shrouds the Divine mysteries, namely the Divine Essence and Attributes.

Every being, at its own particular level, is telling of that eternal Essence. For each being is in reality one of the Divine words; all together, they comprise the Divine Scroll. That Book then is comprised of all the various beings in existence. And the spiritual reality of this Book of Creation is the Imām who possesses the ultimate station of universal *wilāyah*, and who is

[46] Qur'an, 36: 12

far beyond all time and space. That Imām is thus the reality of this Palace, this great abode of existence. And it is in this sense that the Imām holds dominion over all things, whether those things be heavenly or dreadful. It cannot be that those evil beings, those beings destined for Hell, are part of a separate existence and thus not included in this Book, or that they are free of the dominion or reign of the Imām. They are part and parcel of this Book, incorporated under the reign of universal *wilāyah*. The wretched and the people of Hell are contained in that Book and there is nothing and nobody that the Imām's dominance is not extended over him.

Of course, the righteous will adhere to their Imām and enter Paradise, whereas the sinful and the wretched will abide by their Imāms and be banished to Hell. However, all of these groups, indeed this entire system, functions under the aegis and reign of that universal *wilāyah* and operates with his knowledge and will such that he directs each of them to their particular destinies. In this vein, both the Sunni and Shī'a sources have narrated the following *ḥadīth*: "'Ali is the separator between those who reside in Heaven and those who are banished to Hell.'"[47]

At the macrocosmic level, that original Book is comprised of all of creation, of those that belong to the lower material realms or the higher spiritual realms of existence. From this macrocosmic book, that is, from this universal Scroll, will be derived each individual's actions on the Day of Judgment, and their fate will be determined by those actions that are contained therein. Thus, as it is mentioned in the Qur'an, *And We have copied what you have committed.*[48]

That Clear Book, which contains all deeds, is under the dominion of the universal spirit of *wilāyah*, and each derivation, each individual chronicle, will be appropriate and particular to

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[47] Sulayman ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qandūzī al-Ḥanafī, *Yanābi' al-Mawaddah*, pp. 83–85.

علي حبة جنه إمام الانس و الجنه
وصي المصطفي حقا قسيم النار و الجنه

[48] Qur'an, 45: 29

the person it is derived for. Each person will receive from that Book what he has committed, nothing more or less. The evil will be called towards their chronicles of evil, and the righteous will be called to their righteous deeds. This call will come from their respective Imāms, those same righteous or evil Imāms by means of whom they will either be welcomed to Paradise or banished to Hell. Yet all of these Imāms and their followers are subject to the sovereignty of that Clear Book, and are annihilated in that universal *wilāyah*. God willing, we will explore this issue further in the discussion on the People of Battlements (A'arāf)[49] and will show their ascendancy over the people of Heaven and Hell.

One meaning of *wilāyah* denotes the removal of the veil such that nothing separates two things. Thus, the station of proximity to God (*qurb*) is usually taken as identical with the station of *wilāyah*. One instance of *wilāyah* is when all veils, all things that separate man from God, are removed, and man is fully immersed and entirely annihilated in the Divine and attains that station of pure and absolute servanthood. This is a true instance of *wilāyah* between man and God. God has engendering will and command (*wilāyah al-takwīnī*) over all created things, while He also has legislative guardianship (*wilāyat-e tashrī'ī*) over His servants brought nigh to Him. Hence, the Divine Name Walī, and the Divine Attribute of *wilāyah*. *Your friend is only God, and His Messenger, and the believers who perform the prayer and pay the alms, and bow them down.*[50]

Obviously, Imām is not a Divine Name, nor is *imāmah* a Divine Attribute, because *imāmah* necessitates a similitude between two beings. Imām means a leader, and a follower must understand him as such, and see him as a being to be emulated,

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[49] Qur'an, 7: 45–46: *And on the Ramparts are men knowing each by their mark, who shall call to the inhabitants of Paradise: "Peace be upon you! They have not entered it, for all their eagerness." And when their eyes are turned towards the inhabitants of the Fire they shall say, "Our Lord, do not Thou assign us with the people of the evildoers."*

[50] Qur'an, 5: 55. See also 18: 44: *Thereover protection belongs only to God the True; He is best rewarding, best in the issue.*

or one that he must seek to emulate. He must attempt to correspond his actions to the actions of his leader, and because of this correspondence, there must be similarity between the two, namely between the leader and the follower. Thus if the follower is human, the leader must also be human. *Say: "I am only a mortal the like of you."*[51]

Yet God is not created, and therefore is not an Imām. We mentioned that on the Day of Judgment, the believers will follow in the footsteps of their Imām, and will be brought under his aegis, under his *wilāyah*; just as the disbelievers will be associated with their own leaders and will fall under their *wilāyah*. Yet to be clear, it must be emphasized that *wilāyah* at that station does not mean that those leaders can lead their followers wherever they please. Rather, the extent of *wilāyah* meant here is that very same obeisance they were committed to in this world, that is to say, those leaders cannot cross the limits placed upon them. This relationship between the Imām and his followers is one of actions and reactions, where the followers correspond to and abide by the actions of their leaders. Thus the leaders of the evil cannot ease the punishment of their evil followers. Rather, just as in this world they called their followers to amorality, polytheism, and idol-worship, in the Hereafter they will call the evil to the punishment that awaits them, that punishment that is the spiritual reality of the very same actions they committed in the world. They will lead as leaders, and their followers will follow them. Yet there is no contradiction here between what was just mentioned regarding the true Imāms—who hold that greater *wilāyah* over all leaders and followers, both the righteous and the false/evil—and what was said earlier about the difference between being called to a particular chronicle of their actions and the call to the Imām. For we also said that each person is called to righteousness or evil by means of their Imām. *And thou will see each nation crouching, every nation being summoned unto its record.*[52]

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[51] Qur'an, 18: 111
[52] Qur'an, 45: 28

There is no contradiction here: it is indeed the Clear Book from which each person's chronicles of actions are derived, and the clear Imām is the spirit and life of that Book as well as its meaning as stated in the Qur'an: *And on the day when the Hour is come, upon that day the vain-doers shall lose. And thou shalt see every nation hobbling on their knees, every nation being summoned unto its Book: "Today you shall be recompensed for that you were doing. This is Our Book, that speaks against you the truth; We have been registering all that you were doing."*[53]

The origin of that book which speaks the truth is that Guarded Tablet (*Lawḥ al-maḥfuẓ*), from which the individual chronicles are derived. It is that original copy, that Clear Book that is the source of all beings, which oversees all of creation and from which emerges each individual's chronicle. Indeed, this Imām determines those who will reside blissfully in Heaven and those banished to Hell. Yet what each individual receives in terms of his own chronicle will not be this Book; rather it will be derived from this Book. That derived Book will be what they must bear upon themselves, shackled upon their necks; *And every man—We have fastened to him his bird of omen upon his neck.*[54] Thus all people will be called to their individual chronicles of actions, all of which are derived from, and therefore originate in, that original great Book, the inner reality of which is the *Imām al-mubīn.*

The Qur'an also mentions a third group, a group that is composed neither of the righteous, nor the evil; it is neither those will enjoy a goodly fate nor those who will be banished. This is in fact a third category of beings: *And you shall be three bands—Companions of the Right (O Companions of the Right!) Companions of the Left (O Companions of the Left!) and the Foremost: the Foremost those are they brought nigh the Throne.*[55]

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[53] Qur'an, 45: 29.
[54] Qur'an, 17: 13.
[55] Qur'an, 56: 7–11

Those who are brought nigh—the proximate—are a group who have taken precedence. They are the closest to the inner sanctum of the Divine, that Absolute Truth. Whereas the righteous receive their Book of Deeds from the side of righteousness and the evil from the side of evil, this third group—the proximate—have no Book of Deeds to receive. They have surpassed even the righteous. After all, the latter have a set of actions for and by themselves whose fruits they will see. Yet this final group, the Foremost, have no Book of Deeds. Indeed, nowhere in the Qur'an is it stated that this group will have to even bear a chronicle of their actions. So then what will become of them? What rewards (or punishments) will they reap (if they have no acts in the first place)?

As was previously mentioned, this third group, the Foremost (*al-sābiqūn*), who are also called those purified by God (*mukhlaṣīn*), are exempted from many things including being judged, and the universal principles of reward and punishment do not apply to them.[56] *On the day the Trumpet is blown, and terrified is whosoever is in the heavens and earth, excepting whom God wills, and every one shall come to Him, all utterly abject.*[57] And, *For the Trumpet shall be blown, and whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is in the earth shall swoon, save whom God wills. Then it shall be blown again, and lo, they shall stand, beholding.*[58]

In another verse, stating Satan's promise, he says, *Now, by Thy glory, I shall pervert them all together, excepting those thy servants among them that are devoted.*[59] Indeed, only those purified by God (*mukhlaṣīn*) are immune from Satan's grasp, for they have completed their struggle against their carnal souls and have come out triumphantly and purified. *Glory be to God above that they describe, except for God's sincere servants.*

Basically, what can be understood from all these verses is that those purified [by God] do not appear for reckoning on

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[56] See our discussion in the twenty-third and twenty-fourth discourses.
[57] Qur'an, 27: 87
[58] Qur'an, 39: 68
[59] Qur'an, 15: 40

Judgment Day. They do not have a chronicle of actions and are exempted from accepting the book of their deeds. When a person commits a particular act, he is doing so to reach a particular goal for which he has a particular intent and aim. It is that intent for which a person commits an act. But those who are brought nigh to God have no personal expectation for their actions; they attempt to reach and commit an act solely and sincerely for the Divine Pleasure. Therefore, in reality, their acts are not of themselves; rather, it is God Who acts through them. And obviously, God has no chronicle of deeds. This is a station attained only by one who is annihilated in the Divine Essence; his being is purified of all things other than God; his entire self is cleansed of all traces of duality. He enters the realm of absolute *Tawḥīd* and at that station, there exists no personal identity and entification—hence no actions or books of deeds.

The deed of those purified by God (*mukhlaṣīn*) descends directly with the Divine Essence and ascends to the Divine Essence. It becomes annihilated directly in the Divine Essence, and not at any station below that ultimate station. These individuals reside in the inner sanctum of the Divine. God Himself is their companion and intimate Friend. He is their *walī*. Then, from whence would their actions, their chronicle of actions, emerge? That inner sanctum is bound neither by time nor space. As such, [in that realm] a chronicle of actions would become entirely meaningless.

Now if the chronicle of a man's actions is the detailed recording of the spiritual truths of his actions, it would entail that the truth of those actions appears and is present at the level of Divine Unity and the Realm of the Divine. Yet no such thing, neither form nor matter, neither word nor meaning, appears at that realm. No division or distinction exists there; hence there is no chronicles of actions. Thus, those brought nigh to God (*muqarrabūn*) essentially have no chronicle of actions, and that is the reason the Qur'an does not mention at any point that they receive any chronicle.

In their spiritual journey those brought nigh to God (*muqarrabūn*) reach the station of annihilation in the Divine (*fanā'*), and no personal trait or identity is left in their being.

Their attributes are completely annihilated in God's and they have no personal will or action. God has taken over their being and nothing persists from their selves. All their attributes and even their very essences are annihilated in the Divine Attributes and Essence. They have nothing left of themselves: no will or desire; no action or intent. It is then God Who acts through and by their beings. He is the subject; it is His will and His want, and thus His act. They have given their entire being to the Divine Self. In turn, God exists in and through their beings. And because they sacrificed everything for God, their reward will be God Himself. This station is described in a beautiful poem regarding [the martyrdom of] Imām Ḥusayn:

On the threshold of the Friend no one can prostrate
Except him whose head is the place of the spear of love
You, sacrificed for Me, and I, the blood-money for you
Shall love, in all its glory, be sacrificed for you.[60]

If this is the station of those brought nigh to God and none of their deeds are chronicled, then what happens to their acts of worship, and the hardships and difficulties they endured for that worship? Do they receive any share of all those beautiful gardens of Paradise, all those eternal blessings that God Himself speaks of? Are those just for the righteous servants of God and not for this group?

Of course, the *muqarrabūn* will enjoy all the bounties of Heaven as the righteous do. But they will enjoy them not at the station of annihilation, but rather at the station of subsistence after annihilation (*baqā' ba'd al-fanā'*), the station of the ultimate union, that is called the "comprehension of all comprehensiveness" (*Jam' al-jam'*). While in this station, immersed in the Divine Essence, they will enjoy these bounties, whereas the People of the Right will benefit from the Divine blessings

[60] Shaykh 'Abbās Qomi, *Nafs al-Mahmūm fi Muṣībat-i Sayyidunā al-Ḥusayn al-Maẓlūm*, trans. Into Persian by Abu'lhasan Sha'ranī, *Dam' al-Sujum fi Tarjumah Nafs al-Humūm,* Tehran: 1387/2008, p. 196

without being annihilated in the Divine Essence. These bounties are the rewards of continuous wayfaring. He who has attained the inner sanctum does not need such rewards. At that ultimate station of gnosis, no more is there love and passion [even they cease to exist!]. Love and passion only exist upon the path. He who is a true Knower of God (*'Ārif bi'lLāh*) has no more wayfaring or journey. At that station, a person feels neither pain nor pleasure, neither happiness nor sadness, neither hope nor fear. He does not feel strength, knowledge, or even the feeling of existence. Ibn Fāriḍ has examined this state of the sincerely devout and those states of utter annihilation in a most beautiful poem:

In truth I lead my prayer leader in prayer,
And see him behind me
Whatever direction I turn
I see him there;

In my prayer I see my prayer leader before me
And in my heart I witness the prayer leader of my nation

No wonder that the prayer leader
prayed facing toward me
for he knew that God had settled in my heart
and He is the Pivot of the pivot direction of my prayer
[the *Qiblah* of my *qiblah*]

All six directions turned toward me
With all there was
Of worship and pilgrimage
Both the Great [*ḥajj*] and the Lesser [*'umrah*].

At Abraham's Station,
To her I pray my prayers
And in there I witness
Her prayer at me.

We are both a single worshiper indeed
Prostrating in union to His Reality
In every single prostration.[61]

Those who are brought nigh to God and are immersed in the ocean of Divine light and are totally intoxicated by the theophany of the Divine Essence; how could they be preoccupied with the manifestation of Divine Attributes? Before attaining this station they are veiled from God's Essence, but after they reach the station of subsistence in God (*baqā' bi'llāh*) they are only engrossed with His Essence. He who is immersed in the Divine Essence would not be concerned with Heaven or Hell, or anything else other than God. Thus, he declares with a loud voice, "O Lord! I do not worship you for the fear of Your Hellfire, nor coveting Your Paradise; O Lord, I worship You, for I have found only You worthy of worship, so I worship You."[62] The only intention and motivation of such a servant for worshiping God is to reach God and experience Him. One's worshiping God out of the fear of Hell or hope for Paradise is, in reality, worshiping one's own self. He who is brought nigh to God has gone beyond those desires of the carnal soul. For such a person Paradise is immersion in Divine light and annihilation in the theophany of the Divine Essence. *God has bought from the believers their selves and their possessions against the gift of Paradise.*[63]

Here is Heaven today, what need I of tomorrow?
This I have achieved, what need I of more?
Why shall I believe the promises of the morrow?
O ye ascetic, I care not for that Heaven's door.[64]

He who is brought nigh to God experiences his own nothingness before Him and realizes that He is the only true Being!

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[61] For the complete text of this poem see Ibn Fāriḍ, *Dīwān,* pp. 60.
[62] 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib, as quoted in *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. IX, pp. 511
[63] Qur'an, 9: 111
[64] Ḥāfiẓ, *Dīwān* (Pezhman edition), p. 157

A slave, indeed, can never be his own master, so he confesses that

In my robe of honor there is nothing
but [spiritual] poverty
My tongue is weak; can't say but naught.

In addition to those who are brought nigh to God, and in the exact opposite station, is another group that will not receive a chronicle of their actions. But this group is entirely different from the first group in the sense that they have fallen to such a low level and have become immersed in appetite and desires and perfidy to such an extent that they have destroyed all the signs of God within themselves. They have wasted all spiritual potentialities, and their nature has become evil and ugly.

They are at constant war with the truth and with the followers of the truth. As a result ugliness and evil have entered their very essence, such that their very existence has become a source of evil deeds and criminal acts. They become both outwardly and inwardly treacherous, and their nature becomes infested and darkened. This group will not receive the chronicles of their actions because not just their deeds but their substance has become evil. Those whose actions and not essence become evil, however, will receive the book of their deeds. About this group the Qur'an says that their actions will be corrupted and destroyed (*habt-l a'māl*), as they reside in the lowest depths of Hell.[65] This group will suffer far more than any other and taste the Hell-fire more than any other. And in truth, Hell is the realization of the true essence of this group.

The People of the Right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*) are people of righteousness and good deeds. Yet the goodness of their deeds never penetrates into their essence to become their nature. If it had, they would have become among those brought nigh to God (*muqarrabīn*). And the People of the Left (*aṣḥāb al-shimāl*), while being preoccupied with their evil deeds and sins,

[65] Qur'an, 3: 22: *Those are they, whose works have failed in the world and the Hereafter; and they have no helpers.*

might at times commit some good deeds as well. They will suffer in Hell for their evil deeds for a while to prepare to leave it. However, the person who rejects all righteousness entirely and denies all goodness in this world will not be judged by his deeds, but rather by the reality of his essence.

According to some narrations there are differences of opinion on whether man's deed may or may not be corrupted and destroyed (*habt-l a'māl*) in its entirety, except in three cases where there is a consensus.

One such case is polytheism (*shirk*), that is, to assign a partner to God and consider another being to participate or share His Essence and effect His Attributes or Acts. *It has been revealed to thee, and to those before thee, "If thou associatest other gods with God, thy work shall surely fail and thou wilt be among the losers."*[66]

The reason that polytheism results in corruption and destruction of deeds (*habt-l a'māl*) is because the reality of virtuous deeds originates in the realm of Divine Unicity. Yet a polytheist refuses to view the world in terms of that Unicity and blinds himself to the Supreme Reality. He assigns existence to the shadow of the truth and contingencies and attributes and acts of the Absolute to contingent beings. In reality, his actions are worthless, however spectacular they may seem. By assigning a partner to God, in fact he declares war with the truth and with the Real King of the universe. Thus, all of his actions are voided, just as with a slave who performs his duties well, but holds a deep hatred and contempt for his master.

The second act is disbelief (*kufr*), that is, a person who is aware of the truth of God and His Messenger, but rejects them and denies the truthfulness of the Prophet. This person's actions will also become naught. For after all, by rejecting the truth of the Prophet, he is rejecting that very God who sent the Prophet: *Whoso disbelieves in the faith, his work has failed.*[67]

The third is apostasy. This is the rejection of the truth of Islam after having realized it: *...and whosoever of you turns*

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[66] Qur'an, 39: 65
[67] Qur'an, 5: 217

from his religion, and dies disbelieving—their works have failed in this world and the next; those are the inhabitants of the Fire; therein they shall dwell forever.[68]

An undifferentiated definition of apostasy is as follows: an apostate is one who abandons Islam. Now there are two possibilities in such cases. Either he will revert to his religion, in which case he will repent and his repentance will be accepted and he will enter Heaven regardless of whether the legal injunction against him is carried out or not. Carrying out the legal injunctions about apostasy is not contingent upon repentance. Whosoever truly repents and asks God for forgiveness will be forgiven. This is regardless of whether the apostate is male or female, whether he is an innate apostate (*fitri*) or parental (*melli*). An innate (*fitri*) apostate is a person whose parents, both or one of them, were Muslims when he was conceived and he accepted Islam at the age of puberty, but decided to leave Islam after that. A parental apostate (*melli*) is a person whose parents were not Muslim when he was conceived but who entered Islam at the age of maturity and left Islam later.

From the point of view of the implementation of the legal injunctions of Islam, there are two types of punishments for an apostate. One who commits apostasy has indeed turned away from his primordial nature; that is to say, he has rejected his own religion at birth. In such a case and after examining all evidence, if a person is proven an apostate in a court, his punishment would be death. Of course, this only applies if he is man. For a woman, a religious judge will dispense the punishment. She will be punished by being house-imprisoned. During the times of prayer she will be lashed until she repents and returns to Islam.

As for a parental apostate (*melli*) whose parents were both nonbelievers at the time of his conception but who entered Islam only to leave it later, his punishment is not death, whether he is a man or a woman. Since such an apostate's rejection of Islam was on the plane of the law and the Shari'ah, not the

[68] Qur'an, 2: 21

spirit and essence of faith, if he repents he will be freed. Otherwise, he will be imprisoned and the injunctions of innate apostasy will be extended to him until he reverts to Islam. Of course, all such discussions and injunctions pertain to the outward laws and Islamic penal code. But from the point of view of the inner reality, if an apostate truly repents and sincerely accepts Islam, he will be forgiven and will be taken to Heaven, even if the religious injunction (punishment) is carried out against him. But if he does not repent, and insists on his apostasy, leaving this world in a state of disbelief, then his acts will be naught. He will suffer in Hell-fire eternally without regard for any good or evil act he has committed; *their works have failed in this world and the next; those are the inhabitants of the Fire; therein they shall dwell forever.*

The fourth is denying the signs of God's power and seeing God. This is the category of people who deny God and encountering Him [on the Day of Judgment]. They take pleasure in ridiculing and critiquing the law and honors of Islam. They go to lengths to find fault with the Qur'anic verses, or the prophetic *ḥadīth* or the narrations of the Imāms. In fact, this group argues that it is impossible to attain proximity to God, and they therefore question the possibility of returning to God and encountering Him on the Day of Judgment. Even if they claim to be Muslim, they will say, "This saying of the Prophet is irrelevant to our day and is worthy of the chronicles of history. Religious laws are all outdated and anachronistic and they should be reformed to correspond to Western injunctions and laws; and the Prophet's words about Heaven and Hell were simply a means of controlling the masses, and do not contain any truth." This group will also see their actions come to naught, as the Qur'an says: *Say: "Shall We tell you who will be the greatest losers in their works? Those whose striving goes astray in the present life, while they think that they are working good deeds. Those are they that disbelieve in the signs of their Lord and the encounter with Him; their works have failed, and on the Day*

of Resurrection We shall not assign to them any weight."[69] And there are plenty of other verses similar to this in the Qur'an.[70]

This group of people will also see all their actions come to naught. It is as though they set fire to all their actions, burning them as stored tinder. Indeed at the peak of the mountain, it only requires one misstep for a man to fall to his death. No matter how much good these people may do, all of it is lost, for it was not done for God, nor for His pleasure. Rather, they intended only their own pleasure and only their own well-being. Their deeds are worthless in the realm of the truth and will all be annihilated, and they will thus not have a Book of Deeds.

Finally, the fifth is disrespecting the Prophet or the Imāms, and insulting *wilāyah. O believers, advance not before God and His Messenger; and fear God. God is All-hearing, All-knowing. O believers, raise not your voices above the Prophet's voice, and be not loud in your speech to him, as you are loud one to another, lest your works fail while you are not aware.*[71]

Any form of disrespect, whether it be raising one's voice over theirs or rejecting their opinions, will cause one's acts to become naught. In rejecting their views, one in fact rejects the truth. A person must not give one undue authority and impose his views on another; rather, he must surrender before the truth and accept it.

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[69] Qur'an, 18: 103–5

[70] See for example 33: 19, and 47: 28.

[71] Qur'an, 49: 1–2

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Forty-Fourth Discourse

Testimony on Human Deeds

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *And the earth shall shine with the light of its Lord, and the Book shall be set in place, and the Prophets and witnesses shall be brought, and justly the issue be decided between them, and they not wronged.*[72]

This discourse is devoted to the station of *witnessing* (*Shahādah*), which is one of the stations of the Day of Return. There are many Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions regarding the issue of how the actions of man will be attested to on that Day. Firstly though we must ask: what does "attestation" and "bearing witness" mean here? Secondly: what will these witnesses testify about, i.e., what is the subject about which they will bear witness? Thirdly: who are those who will bear witness and what are their qualifications?

In this blessed verse, God states that on that Day, the world will be illuminated by the light of the Lord. Every man and woman will receive his or her chronicle of deeds. The prophets and those who will give testimony will also be present. And judgment will be issued against them such that they will never be dealt with unjustly and they will not be oppressed. From this verse, we can understand that when they disperse the chronicle of deeds for each individual, the prophets and the bearers of witness will also be called. The earth will be illuminated and will emerge from the darkness. They will present the judgment of each person in the presence of the prophets and those bearers of witness. With that judgment, all will receive their just verdict. That judgment will be made without any injustice or oppression.

Previously, it was stated that the Day of Judgment will be such that *the Earth will be transformed in a way that will (seem*

[72] Qur'an, 39: 69

to) be other than the Earth.[73] It is when the Earth will present its truest nature and will illuminate itself. On that day, a man's actions, which were until then concealed and wrapped upon themselves, will be unraveled and presented to him. That darkness will turn into light and the actions of men will become apparent. The prophets and witnesses will emerge to give testimony, and men will be judged on the basis of the effects of the actions they committed. They will be presented with the fruits and consequences of those actions.

The term *Shahādah* has two separate meanings. A *shahīd* (a martyr) and a *shāhid* (witness) both mean the same thing. One who becomes a martyr at war is called *shahīd*, for he attained Divine Presence and will remain there eternally.

Or a *shāhid* can refer to the *object* of witnessing. In other words, the term *shāhid* can also refer to one to whose goodness the angels of mercy will bear witness at the time of his death. *God, who is the Knower of the manifest and non-manifest*[74] also witnesses the martyr.

Another meaning of the term *shāhid* refers to a person who testifies in a court of law. Indeed this witnessing has two phases: first is the witnessing of the object or action; second, the bearing of that which is witnessed. The former is the stage of direct witnessing—a moment of direct apprehension of experiential and presential (*huḍūrī*) knowledge, and of seeing the subject of witnessing directly. The second stage is presenting this witnessing or giving testimony, say in a court of law.

Now, when a person bears witness to a thing or act, the witness must be aware of the nature of that which he is witnessing. And the more specificity we demand of his witnessing, the deeper his witnessing and his knowledge of that thing must be. For example, we can say that "Zayd was seen" or that "Zayd was seen in the mosque" or "Zayd was seen in the *masjid* praying" or "Zayd was seen in the mosque praying, performing all the recommended acts of prayer, with spiritual presence, and in perfect attention to his Lord." The more

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[73] Qur'an, 14: 48

[74] Qur'an, 39: 46

clauses are added, the more specificity required, the more difficult the witnessing. Indeed, the witnessing must be commensurate with what is being sought. Of course, not many can fully witness the spiritual presence of Zayd so that they can testify to it. This requires one to be aware of Zayd's spiritual state, and knowledge of the heart of Zayd, and of all that which passes through his mind and soul. Otherwise, one could not bear witness to this act.

We must ask: what will the prophets and those who bear witness testify to on the Day of Judgment? Will they just testify to the physical acts committed in this world? Or will they testify to our inner states, our spiritual presence, and our awareness of God and proximity to Him, which is the reality and spirit of our deeds? Of course it will be the second category of things. Those who shall testify to these aspects of our acts must be aware of those aspects and must witness to them. And the Qur'an also attests to this notion that the prophets and witnesses will testify to the acts of man. They will testify to each individual's deeds in all his or her states, in all forms, and in all places that they were committed, whether the acts involved others or not, whether they related to existence or non-existence, whether in public or private. They must be witnesses to all the various dimensions of an act so they can give appropriate testimony to those acts. The ordinary people cannot even testify to all the apparent acts of a person, let alone the true reality of each act.

Thus, not everyone is capable of testifying to the realities of our actions. Those witnesses must be completely aware of all the inward and outward dimensions of our actions, for whom those inner and outer realities are equally apparent so that they can bear witness to those actions and properly testify The witness must have as much access to the heart, mind, and soul of each individual as that individual has to himself, and be as aware of his thoughts and secrets as he is or even more. As it is stated, *nay, man shall be a clear proof against himself, even though he offer his excuses.*[75]

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[75] Qur'an, 75: 14–15

As was previously mentioned, those servants who were brought nigh to God (*muqarrabūn*) and those purified by God (*mukhlaṣīn*) have certain attributes, such as having intellectual and existential dominion over the realms of existence and contingency. Only those who are not bound by the inherent limitations of this world, who have no attachment to the world of matter, can testify to the reality of one's actions. These are people who have severed all desires of the self and have removed all the veils that would limit their insight to the realm of mater. They have ventured beyond their material senses and gained intellectual dominion over all beings, whether they are in this world or not. Without these attributes, they could not testify or be witnesses.

Another issue is that on the Day of Judgment, any testimony or speech shall be possible only with God's permission; *The day it comes, no soul shall speak save by His leave.*[76] And such sanction is not simply a formal writ. In addition to being honored by this permission to speak, that person with permission must also be able to speak at the plain of the endangered realities and do so truthfully and correctly. He must first be able to witness properly, so that he can testify properly. Now if the person has not even witnessed properly, how can he testify properly? On that Day *Those they call upon, apart from Him, have no power of intercession, save such as have testified to the truth, and that knowingly.*[77] God willing, in our discussion of the issue of intercession, we will explain in depth those who have the right to intercede on that Day. But very briefly, truthful testimony must be done with knowledge of the thing that is being testified about for intercession to even be relevant. Before God those who will intercede are only among those who bear witness, meaning they must testify truthfully and knowingly. They must be aware of who they intercede for. They must know the reality of what they testify about.

For those individuals who set foot on the path of religiously sanctioned spiritual practices and wayfaring, and who master

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[76] Qur'an, 11: 105–8

[77] Qur'an, 43: 86

theosophical wisdom by God's Will and help, their knowledge will be illuminated with the light of piety and thus attain knowledge of the hidden sciences and Divine mysteries and go beyond the realm of senses, and their perception will exceed the limited plane of the material and physical world. As the Prophet said, "He who acts upon what he knows, God will bestow upon him the knowledge of things he did not possess." Thus, God illuminates the heart of him who purifies his heart, and who acts righteously and turns away from all that which distracts him from the Divine. This is a blessing that is bestowed only upon those who purify their souls from all impurities that prevent the mirror of their being from reflecting the Divine light; as it has been said, "Beware of the insight of a [true] believer for indeed a [true] believer sees things with Divine light." In other words, just as God is aware of each person's innermost secrets, a true believer gains access to that Divine light. As he becomes one of those who are brought nigh to God (*muqarrabīn*), his soul is transformed and he begins to see things with that light. Hence, neither his attributes nor even his essence is separate from God, for they derive their knowledge and existence from that Divine knowledge and luminosity. That Divine Light emanates in his entire being, illuminating his heart, and allows him to manifest all of creation in the mirror of his own being, shining in a most purified and unblemished state. And once his soul is purified, all the Divine Names manifest in his being, both the magnificent and the beatific Names, as he comes to possess all the Divine Names that pertain to both this world and the Hereafter. Indeed, this is not confined to only those who are brought nigh to God; but also those who have not even attained such a station but are journeying on the Divine path and attain the station of purity will witness in accordance with their own spiritual capabilities.

This quality is only attainable by the righteous Imāms and not the leaders of falsehood. The leaders of falsehood will only call their followers to their ignoble deeds; they cannot fulfill that witness which the righteous leaders do. After all, the leaders of falsehood are themselves shrouded in darkness. They are blind to that light and ignorant of the truth. *Whosoever is blind*

in this world, shall be blind in the world to come, and he shall be even farther astray from the way.[78]

So the question is, how is it possible for him to see the actions of others and act as witnesses? As the Qur'an says, *And to whomsoever God assigns no light, no light has he.*[79] In this very verse, God explicates how much such a person is plunged into this darkness *When he puts forth his hand, wellnigh he cannot see it.* The path of such knowledge is closed off to him and he has no access to the secrets of others. Rather, only *Shadows piled one upon another.*[80] And whosoever falls under their dark wing will be dragged into the same darkness and will be blinded to the truth: *And the unbelievers—their protectors are idols, that bring them forth from the light into the shadows; those are the inhabitants of the Fire, therein dwelling forever.*[81] In contrast, for those who uphold good, *God is the Protector of the believers; He brings them forth from the shadows into the light.*[82] The Qur'an describes such a man in the following terms: *Say: "Work; and God will surely see your work, and His Messenger, and the believers, and you will be returned to Him who knows the unseen and the visible, and He will tell you what you were doing."*[83]

Obviously, our deeds are not hidden from God, but what is inconceivable is that our deeds are not hidden from the prophets and even the truly sincere believers. How is it possible for the Prophet and true believers who live alongside ordinary men in time and space to be aware of his deed and give testimony on his behalf? The answer is that the true believers who follow the path of the Prophet have access to the secrets of men, and function as witnesses to their deeds.

The ordinary people assume the prophets and the Imām are limited in their perception and perceive the world only while they are awake, just as they do. Yet the Prophet explicitly

[78] Qur'an, 17: 72
[79] Qur'an, 24: 40
[80] Qur'an, 24: 40
[81] Qur'an, 2: 255
[82] Qur'an, 2: 257
[83] Qur'an, 9: 105

states, "My eyes may sleep but my heart is (always) awake and never sleeps." He is always awake; indeed for such as him, sleep and wakefulness are one and the same; the manifest and non-manifest are not different. Life and death are equal. He is in a constant state of consciousness and awareness. He is constantly alive and conscious, as he said, "We have not died with death nor are we buried in our graves."

That is the reason God addresses the Prophet and says, "Say [unto them] 'Act! God will behold your actions, and [so will] His messenger and the believers, and you will be brought back to the Knower of the invisible and the visible, and He will tell you what you have done.'"[84] One must pay very close attention to this verse. It says here: God will make you aware of your own actions. What is the meaning of this statement here? How will He make us aware of our actions? For the same reason that the Prophet and the believers will be aware of our actions, one of the ways God makes His creation aware of their own actions is *by means of the Prophet's testimony*. And that testimony is valid because the Prophet's and the believers' knowledge are united with God's knowledge. It is here that we can truly appreciate the Qur'anic verses, how with even the most concise statements they convey such an incredible reality of truth. Indeed, the Prophet's and the believers' testimony is God's testimony (against or for a person's actions). In a tradition narrated by 'Ali ibn Ibrāhīm, Imām Ṣādiq is reported to have said: "The deeds of all people are presented to the Prophet every morning and night. These are the deeds of both the good and the evil. So beware! For each one of you will have his evil deeds seen by the prophets."

In 'Ayyāshī's commentary on the verse he reports a narration from Imām Ṣādiq, who states, "The believers herein mentioned are the Imāms." There are too many more narrations in this regard to be mentioned here.[85]

A believer as described in this context is not the one who simply utters the call of Islam and then commits whatever evil

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[84] Qur'an, 9: 105–6

[85] 'Ayyāshī, 2: 109

deed his carnal soul calls him to. Rather, a believer is one who has risen above the limits of humankind, who has attained a certain level of perfection. It is reported in many different narrations that once a week angels present our deeds to the Twelfth Imām, the Master of the Age. He witnesses our good deeds and is elated. When he sees the evil, he is saddened and disappointed. And even the believers become aware of some of those minor secrets, albeit not at the level of the Imām.

Indeed there is that first verse mentioned in the beginning of this discourse, which states: *And the Prophets and witnesses shall be brought, and justly the issue be decided between them, and they not wronged. And every soul shall be paid in full what it has earned, and they shall not be wronged.* Here God states that the action itself becomes its own witness. This testimony is not verbal; rather the action itself testifies to its own existence. Man sees the reality of the deed in himself and bears witness to it. Then on the Day of Judgment once again he is presented with it, and he becomes aware of it. And on that Day, *Every soul shall be paid in full what it has earned.*[86]

This reward will be the true form of that deed, in its reality and heavenly form, with God's good pleasure, with gardens underneath which rivers flow, and with that Divine splendor. And if that reality of a person's deed is evil, he will be greeted with the terrible and the vicious, filled with terrifying serpents and horrid demons. In short, in the realm of engendered existence no oppression or injustice is committed, *and they shall not be wronged.*[87] Each person will simply reap the fruit of his own deeds. He will see those deeds admitted and integrated into his very own being and must embrace those deeds as he either journeys towards Heaven or is banished to Hell.

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[86] Qur'an, 39: 70
[87] Qur'an, 39: 60

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Forty-Fifth Discourse

On Knowing the Unseen and the Primary Condition for Witnessing

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *And the day We shall raise up from every nation a witness, then to the unbelievers no leave shall be given, nor shall they be suffered to make amends.*[88]

This verse tells us that the excuses presented by disbelievers will not be heard and they will not be forgiven. There will be one group, however, that has certain attributes to bear the burden of witnessing the deeds of others.

Here, the *umma* refers to a group of people or a community. The verse states that God will raise one witness for the deeds of each and every group and community that exists without any exception. These include each nation to which the many different prophets were sent.

Now, we must ask, what characteristics does that witness have? We said in the previous discourse that each witness must possess knowledge and awareness. Witnessing without knowledge is born of ignorance. This would actually be characterized as false testimony (*zawr*) and would be entirely disregarded. Such testimony is void and whosoever gives such testimony is guilty of a very grave sin.

The righteous servants of God would never give such a false testimony (*zawr*).[89] As was previously mentioned, testimony requires a certain level of witnessing, a certain amount of knowledge and awareness of the inner and the hidden, of the intentions and all the various details of one's actions. Thus, a person who testifies must be a person for whom the hidden and the apparent are the same, who sees both what is concealed and what is revealed, who is not bound by particular time nor place.

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[88] Qur'an, 16: 84

[89] Qur'an, 25: 73

Only then can he be aware of all the different dimensions of a person and his actions. Only then can he be a witness. Without such attributes, witnessing would be beyond him, both existentially and in terms of knowledge.

Thus We appointed you a midmost nation that you might be witnesses to the people, and that the Messenger might be a witness to you.[90] This verse, directed to the Muslims, states that God created Muslims as a moderate community (*mu'tadil*), one that avoids extremism in its various forms and is not mean and rude, and that everything must be measured and all acts must be proportionate for them. Thus this community should function as witnesses towards others, and be conscious of their deeds. For the Prophet was and is attentive to them and is conscious of its deeds.

And yet, as was mentioned before, this community must possess certain characteristics to function as a witness. So how could this verse be referring to the entire Muslim community when there are so few who are truly qualified for such a great task, when so many Muslims are corrupt and indeed seek to corrupt others? How could God, in all His justice and wisdom, consider these individuals to be part of a balanced and moderate community, part of those who are good and righteous? Who would God tell in this community to be attentive to the actions of mankind? Do such incredibly corrupt individuals, the likes of Muawiya, the son of Abū Sufyan, and his son, Yazīd, consider themselves of this community? If so, then how could God refer to this community as treading a "middle path"?

Although the verse appears to be referring to the community in general, the crux of the verse, that from which a final conclusion can be drawn, has a particular referent, and specifies who the verse really means by the term "community." The true referents of this verse are those individuals who possess certain conditions, who meet that criterion that it states thereafter. Now, because this particular set of individuals are among the larger community and are known by means of that community, the verse refers to the community in general. In reality, it

[90] Qur'an, 2: 143

only intends that particular group. This form of iterating a general statement with a particular referent is used frequently in the Qur'an and was in fact common in Arabic literature. For example, in verse 27 of chapter 48, God praises the Prophet, stating that those who stand with God's messenger are vigorously opposed to the enemies of God and are kind and compassionate to His friends. They are constantly in a state of prostration, bowing to the Divine as they pray continuously. They are always in search of their Beloved, namely the visage of God, His grace, and His Satisfaction. Their virtues were extolled by Moses and Jesus in the Torah and Bible respectively. They are even marked by the signs of prostration on their foreheads.

This verse was revealed in Medina. As is well known, during the Medina period, many hypocrites were among the companions of the Prophet who surely did not possess these virtues. And yet the verses just mentioned make this general statement, stating that *those who are with him...*, that those who accompany God's messenger, possess these virtues. Obviously, the hypocrites are not only devoid of such virtues, but are rather the categorical opposite. Indeed Islamic history is replete with their ugly and vile attitude towards the Prophet, such that the Qur'an even has an entire chapter dedicated to them, enumerating all their vices.

Thus we must conclude that the criteria for such praise are those particular virtues that are named, and can only be found in certain individuals such as 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib, 'Uthman son of Maz'ūn, and Salmān. These are people like Abū Dharr Ghifārī, Miqdad, and Ḥamza, and those other sincere companions of the Prophet, who had sincere and purified souls and whose beautiful souls soared and perched on the mystical Lote Tree of Heaven. Indeed only because of their greatness is the verse generalized to include the entire Muslim nation, such that it states *and those who are with him*... so as to praise this particular group. This verse in chapter 48 is the same in this respect as verse 143 in chapter 2: *Thus We appointed you a midmost nation*. It requires a great status for the person to be a witness to the deeds of others, and for the Prophet to be his witness. Not everyone can enjoy such a status. It must be specified

only for those who fit the particular criteria and who possess those attributes that were previously mentioned that are necessary for witnessing.

Now we must find out who the Qur'an is referring to and who these witnesses are. In another verse, the Qur'an is even more explicit about who these people are: *He has chosen you, and has laid on you no impediment in your religion, being the creed of your father Abraham; He named you Muslims aforetime and in this, that the Messenger might be a witness against you, and that you might be witnesses against mankind.*[91]

The key word here is *ijtibā*, meaning "to select," or to promote. For God has appointed and raised them above all others. The verse also names Ibrāhīm as the patriarch of this nation, for indeed it is he who named this community a Muslim nation. Let us see who is being referred to here, and who are those selected and raised by God and named "Muslim" by their father Ibrāhīm and when and where he named them Muslims.

God recounts the story of Ibrāhīm and his building of the Ka'bah in verses 128–29 in chapter two: *Our Lord, receive this from us; Thou art the All-hearing, the All-knowing; and, our Lord, make us submissive to Thee, and of our seed a nation submissive to Thee; and show us our holy rites, and turn towards us; surely Thou turnest, and art All-compassionate; and, our Lord, do Thou send among them a Messenger, one of them, who shall recite to them Thy signs, and teach them the Book and the Wisdom, and purify them; Thou art the All-mighty, the All-wise.*

Starting from verse 125, it tells of how he prayed and called to God, of how he and his son would bring stones and build it in that same place it is found today. And it tells of that great bond and connection created between them and God through these events. It also states *and, our Lord, make us submissive* (i.e. *Muslimīn*) *to Thee, and of our seed a nation submissive to Thee; and show us our holy rites, and turn towards us; surely Thou turnest, and art All-compassionate*. Meaning: O my Lord, You are majestic and independent of all others. You are

[91] Qur'an, 22: 78

Sufficient unto Yourself, and act with Your absolute wisdom and judiciousness. We ask that You accept our prayers. Prophet Ibrāhīm prays, "Our Lord, make us submissive to Thee, and of our seed a nation submissive (*Muslimīn*) to Thee." And indeed his prayer was accepted and his wish fulfilled. God created from His progeny a nation of Muslims who were named as such by Ibrāhīm through this very prayer, who requested that from his descendants God would bring forth "Muslims."

The question posed here is whether the submission (*Islam*) that Ibrāhīm is requesting from his Lord is attained by simply reciting the few words of the *shahādah* outwardly, with little regard for its inner meaning. As one of the five prophets and "Possessor of Command" (*ulu'l 'azm*), a man in his old age, and after going through a great many trials too extensive to be mentioned here and attaining the status of a prophet and an Imām—why does Ibrāhīm plead to his Lord to make him a *Muslim?* What kind of *Islam* is he really asking God for? In reality this is the Greatest *Islam* (*islam-i a'zam*), where his entire existence is immersed and his being is submerged in submission to the Divine Majesty, Magnificence, and Greatness; not just his deeds, but his spirits and his *self*, his ethics and religion, indeed his life and death; in short, his entire being must be for God, just as it is from Him. *My prayer, my ritual sacrifice, my living, my dying—all belongs to God, the Lord of all Being. No associate has He. Even so I have been commanded, and I am the first of those that surrender.*[92]

This is the type of *Islam* Ibrāhīm pleaded God for, and he asked that our Prophet, who is of his progeny, and the progeny of our Prophet, to be blessed with this type of *Islam*. One must be specially chosen for this type of *Islam*. Indeed God Himself must choose one. For one to be blessed with this *Islam*, one must be chosen for the truth, and must be proud of being eponymous with one's father's community: *The creed of your father Abraham; He named you Muslims aforetime.*[93] One must attain the pinnacle of inner purity to reach that level of Islam.

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[92] Qur'an, 6: 162–63
[93] Qur'an, 22: 78

Now, we must see who among the progeny of Ibrāhīm attained this level of purity, and who was worthy of attaining this station. A glance at the sound and authentic narrations makes it abundantly clear that those qualities are found only in the immediate progeny (the Ahl al-Bayt) of the Prophet.

Imām Bāqir once stated, "We are the middle nation; and we are the witnesses of God against His creation and His proofs (*Ḥujjat*) on the earth and in Heaven." Moreover, Sulaym ibn Qays narrates from the Commander of the Faithful who said,

> Indeed God referred to us when He said, *So We appointed you as the middle nation that you may be witnesses against the people, and that the messenger may be a witness against you,*[94] for indeed we are witnesses against the people (and His creation), and His proofs upon the earth. We are those who God refers to when He says, *And we fashioned you into a middle nation.*[95]

In a lengthy discourse recorded in his *al-Manāqib*, Ibn Shahr Āshūb narrates Imām Bāqir who said,

> There are no witnesses upon the people except for the Imāms and God's messengers. As for the *umma* (Muslim community) it would not be appropriate for God to ask for their testimonies, when among them are scattered many whose testimonies in this world would not be accepted, even in cases where the stakes are a small handful of grains. How can a person who cannot be trusted when he testifies about a bag of produce be trusted to testify on the Day of Judgment against a great many people?

It is narrated in 'Ayyāshī's commentary that Imām Ṣādiq stated,

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[94] Qur'an, 2: 143

[95] Hakim Haskāni, *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, 1: 92

> And God said, *Thus We appointed you as a middle nation that you might be witnesses to the people, and that the Messenger might be a witness to you.*[96] Now if you think that God intended by this verse to refer to all those monotheists who face the *qiblah,* then how could it be possible for God to ask for a person to testify on the Day of Judgment and for God to accept his testimony in front of all the previous nations, when in this world no one would accept that person's testimony even regarding a small measure of dates? Nay, God did not intend by this verse such a (lowly) creature; rather He intends by it a nation who heeds the call of Ibrāhīm. He states, "You are the best nation ever brought forth to men," that middle nation. Those are who He intended, that same "best nation ever brought forth to men."[97]

Clearly, what is meant by the *umma* in these verses is the Immaculate Imāms, and it refers to them even without having named them explicitly. The referent for the universal meaning of the *umma* is the particular sense of the Imām, who possess the necessary qualifications for being witnesses against the actions of mankind. In this regard, there are many narrations that are our primary source for understanding the intentions and references of the Qur'an, too many to be stated here. There are explicit verses like the following: *How then shall it be, when We bring forward from every nation a witness, and bring thee to witness against those?*[98]

This is even more clearly stated in the following verse: *And the day We shall raise up from every nation a witness against them from amongst them.* This verse is more explicit than the one before, because it states, *the day We shall raise up...* and establish you *From amongst them...* meaning from amongst the people themselves. In other words, on that Day God will establish a select few from among the people themselves (to fulfill this role of "bearing witness").

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[96] Qur'an, 2: 143

[97] 'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. I, p. 63

[98] Qur'an, 4: 31–32

And in his commentary on this verse 'Ali ibn Ibrāhīm Qomi states, "This refers to the Imām; for God's messenger is a witness upon them and they are witnesses upon the people."

Also, Shaykh Ṣadūq narrates a *ḥadīth* in his *Faḍā'il al-Shī'ah* (*Virtues of the Shī'ites*) where he cites Imām Ṣādiq, "For the Imāms, the Messenger is a witness, and they are the witnesses for their Shī'ites and their Shī'ites are witnesses for the people. It is by the testimony of their Shī'ites that reward will be dispensed and punishment meted out to the people."

Indeed the Prophet's witness and testimony given for the prophets and the Imām is primarily due to the hierarchy of their stations and functions. The status of the Prophet of Islam is far higher than that of the other prophets and the Imāms. In turn the Imām will intercede for the people and will give testimony for their actions. The people do not have the ability to face the Divine Splendor directly and thus it must be mitigated via the higher stations of the Imām and the prophets.

The Divine Light of Being descends with the requisite stages and hierarchy intact, and every person receives that Light in accordance with his or her own ability and station. Thus one can only arrive to the stations of contentment and submission to the Divine Self through the mediation of the Imām. Without such mediation, one will be profoundly perplexed and lost. How eloquently Ibn Fāriḍ described this when he wrote,

> O our Lord! By the honor or Your friend who is our Prophet
> And Your Messenger, and our noble and humble master
> Grant us Your vision in the company of Your friends
> Such a vision that the hearts of Your friends rush to see
> Your gate is our destination and Your generosity pours in abundance,
> And Your forgiveness is all encompassing.

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Forty-Sixth Discourse

The Witness of the Angels against Men

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *Thou art not upon any occupation, neither recitest thou any Koran of it, nor do you any work, without that We are witnesses over you when you press on it; and not so much as the weight of an ant in earth or heaven escapes from thy Lord, neither is aught smaller than that, or greater, but in a Manifest Book.*

The angels are only one of the many groups who will testify on the Day of Judgment regarding man's actions. In this discourse, we will focus on the witness of these angels. These verses state that there is an angel assigned to each individual, tasked to record all that person's actions. After all, each angel has a different function: some function with regard to knowledge, while others are particular to sustaining life, and so on. This category of angels, as mentioned in these verses, records our actions so that they may function as witnesses on the Day of Resurrection, as they record our actions and preserve them with themselves.

Regardless of whether our actions are good or evil, these two angels, these so-called *mutalaqqiyan*, always accompany this individual and never leave him. They follow him while he sleeps and while he is awake, when he moves and acts, and when he doesn't. They are with him at all times and places, recording even the slightest phrase he may unwittingly utter; *When the two Receivers receive (him) seated on the right hand and on the left. He utters no word but there is with him an observer ready.*[99] And they do not forget, nor are they negligent, nor do they ever tire or become fatigued by their task. Not a word is uttered except that he, the individual, is watched and preserved. Some commentators, such as 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī, have taken the terms *raqīb* and *'atīd* mentioned in the verse not

[99] Qur'an, 50: 17–18

as proper names for two particular angels, but rather as adjectives—as those who observe and look over, who are alert and who witness.

These angels, both observing and attentive, immediately record any deed the individual may do. Therefore, the following verse states: *yet there are over you watchers noble, writers who know whatever you do, generous and recording.*[100] Yet as we mentioned before, there are various categories of angels, each fulfilling its own particular function. None of them can divert from that particular function for which they were created. The angels of knowledge, those of life, of wisdom, of sustenance, each has a particular purpose for its existence and must act in accordance with that existential purpose.

As was previously mentioned, the angels, as humans, have a particular hierarchy. There are various levels of angels: those who are brought nigh [to God] are greater than those particular angels who are farther below the hierarchy. The status of these angels who observe and take account of man's actions also varies according to the category and qualities of deeds they witness.

Each deed varies according to the intention with which that deed is committed; some deeds are committed with more sincerity, while others with less. The sins of the ordinary people include adultery and lying, gambling and drinking; they include transgressing against others' rights or coveting their womenfolk. However, the sins of the faithful are not of the same category, for they have instilled in them a certain aversion towards such cardinal sins. Their sins are of a different order. Their sins are becoming preoccupied with anything other than God. Their status demands that they always be aware and conscious of the Divine. If they were to be negligent of God at any time, that would constitute a sin for which they must repent. When this virtue becomes like a second nature to them, and they are entirely immersed in the Divine Self and ever-conscious of His Names and Attributes, God will raise

[100] Qur'an, 82: 10–12

them to a higher level and more exalted station than before. They will reach the station of the Purified ones (*aṣfiyā'*).

At this station, they will also experience various trials, some of which are incredibly arduous. At times, they may even be tempted to say to themselves, "O Lord, free us of these trials for we are weary!" but their station will not allow them to ever utter such words, for if they did, it would constitute a sin. It is the duty of those in this station to bear any affliction presented to them and to overcome all trials by the Divine without any utterance of hopelessness. They may not even ask for relief. If they do, they must repent. Thus it is said that the *aṣfiyā'* repent for the sin of *tanfīs*, that is, of sadness or asking for respite from hardship and difficulty. Having triumphed in the trials of this station, by the grace of God, they are elevated to the order of the saints, the *awli'yā*.

At this station, there is not even a sense of the sins of the lower levels: not of the sins of the ordinary people, nor of the select (*khawāṣṣ*), nor even the sins of the *aṣfiyā'*. They all become irrelevant because they have surpassed and risen above all these stations. What constitutes a sin for this category is termed as corruption and contamination of thought (*talwīth al-khatir*). These are acts committed at the level of consciousness by these saints.

The mind and memories of a saint (*walī*), indeed his entire consciousness, must be always be transparent and pure. Nothing evil should ever enter his mind. His consciousness should be as transparent as a polished mirror, solely reflecting the Divine. Only the Divine Beauty must shine through, and any other thought that enters his mind would constitute a sin.

Just as in prayer one must clear one's mind of all distractions and thoughts other than God, the saint (*walī*) cannot be distracted by any thoughts other than of God and for God. Only in those instances where God wills, could he allow any thoughts to enter his consciousness. Now, if at any point, any meandering thought or any erstwhile distraction does cross his mind, this would constitute a sin for the *walī* and he must repent. Thus, *the penance of the friends of God (awli'yā) are from a besmeared consciousness.*

If a *walī* can rise above this station and continue to ascend, he will reach a station wherein not even a single thought can enter his mind to distract him of the Divine. His mind, at this higher level, has been so tamed that those thoughts, which fly like birds freely through the landscapes of our minds, do not fly freely through, nor even enter, his mind. *And the Godfearing, when a visitation from Satan troubles them, they do but remember (Allāh's guidance), and they see clearly.*[101]

Once the *walī*'s consciousness achieves this degree of purity, it attains a certain power that enables him to prevent distractions, temptation by Satan, and all incoming thoughts. If this individual still occasionally experiences some flutter of a disturbance or distraction, this would constitute a sin for one at his station. This level of disturbance is called anxiety of the innermost conscious (*idṭirāb as-sirr*). This is not of the kind of ordinary sins of mind and heart. This disturbance of the soul is not even a moment where it is distracted from the Divine, nor even a moment of negligence from it. When such a friend of God encounters unbearable hardships or extremely difficult trials, his soul must remain in peace like a calm ocean with his serenity intact from even the slightest wave. If even the tiniest ripple disturbs that water, if even the gentlest breeze glides upon the water of his being, then this would constitute a sin and he must repent for this distraction and anxiety.

In *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharī'a* it is stated:

> The prophets repent for the disturbance of that anxiety of the innermost consciousness, the saints for contamination of thought (*tallawuth al-khaṭirāt*), the Purified (*aṣfiyā'*) must repent for sadness or asking for respite from hardship and difficulty (*tanfīs*), while the *khawāṣṣ* (select) repent for being preoccupied with anything other than God. And the masses repent for their various bodily sins.

Indeed beyond this station there is also a station that belongs to those who are purified by God (*mukhlaṣīn*) where even

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[101] Qur'an, 7: 201

the anxiety of the innermost conscious (*idṭrāb al-Sirr*) is absent. In that station there is absolute peace and tranquility.

The presence of such a hierarchy denotes that those angels who are called to record man's deeds themselves function at various stations. Some record sins of the general masses, whereas others are responsible for the sins of the select *khawāṣṣ*, meaning those moments when they are distracted from the Divine; some angels record the *tanfīs* of the *aṣfiyā'*, whereas others record the *talwīth* of the saints. Each of these categories of angels can and will record the deeds of the group to whom they are assigned in those moments of trial and tribulation and will account for each of their states and conditions. Having said this all, one must know that man possesses a station that even the greatest angels do not have access to, to record his deeds, because man can ascend to such a station that none can surpass and none can ascend higher, a level inaccessible even to the most proximate angels (*malā'ik al-muqarrab*). Man can reach a level where there remain no veils between him and the Divine Essence, where only he and none other can enter, whether it be those angels of thought or consciousness, those of knowledge or power, to record this station, which is the abode of being alone with Alone. As the Prophet said, "I have such an exalted station with God that no angel brought nigh encompasses." In his supplication known as *Du'a Kumayl* the Commander of the Faithful ('Ali) pleads to God: "Forgive [me] for every evil action that You commanded the two noble scribes to confirm whom You have appointed to record all my deeds and You appointed them as witnesses over me along with the limbs of my body, while You observed over me besides them and You *witnessed those deeds that You concealed from them...*"

No one can know the details of such sins other than God Himself, Exalted is He, Whose forgiveness removes anxiety from the innermost consciousness. God by His grace protects such a believer in His very own proximity and His own presence, serving him directly such that until death no such disturbance enters upon his soul.

These are the various categories of sins committed by man. The angels can witness all these various categories of sins and record each of these evils deeds but are not informed of corruption and contamination of thought (*talwīth al-khāṭir*) and yearning for relief from hardships (*tanfīs*). These are particular to the truly God-conscious, and even the angels, who are bound to certain stations, may not have access to such misgivings.

On a different note, we have narrations that describe two varying groups of angels who are called to record man's deeds: some sent by night while others sent by day. The night-angels are sent to man from the very beginnings of dusk until the break of dawn, while the day-angels arrive at the moment of dawn until dusk. And as one comes to accompany man, the other leaves. They each take their places upon one's shoulder, with one on the right to record good deeds, and the other on the left for evil. The good-fated angels record man's righteous deeds while encouraging such deeds, and those on the left forbid his evil deeds, while simultaneously recording them. Indeed, many of our righteous deeds are caused by the encouragement of those good-fated angels, whereas we abstain from many evil deeds because of the very forbidding of the angels on our left shoulder. There are some who have purified themselves to such a degree that they can see directly the actions of these various beings through their *imaginal* eye.

The Qur'an indeed lays the foundations for a philosophy of Divine Unicity whereby all the acts attributed to these various beings can simultaneously be attributed to God in that these acts originate from Him and are not separate from His deeds. For example, these angels who record our actions do so as the work of God. We cannot say that God knows one thing and these angels know something different. They testify to those acts under the direct control and domination of the Divine. God's knowledge of His creation is *presential* and not acquired. Thus the angelic realities and their actions are all present with God, and their very presence is that Divine knowledge. And hence, the knowledge of the angels is the very same knowledge of God. Thus the angels along with their knowledge are always present for God. This is the very reality of Divine

Omniscience. And in terms of existence, the angels are themselves the very presence of God Himself, for they are within the existential and presential dominion of the Divine. Thus, they are the very grounds for the knowing and witnessing of God.

In other words, the angels are not independent beings in themselves. Rather they are means in an absolute sense. They are wholly mirrors and signs of the Divine, reflecting and manifesting the Divine knowledge. They see and carry out their angelic functions by means of Divine knowledge. Thus if we are looking at the plane of multiplicity, it is upon the angels to fulfill roles and carry out their functions. But from the plane of unity, it is upon God Himself. From one perspective—that of unity in multiplicity—it is the Divine Who is reflected in these various mirrors; from another, that of multiplicity in unity, the angels realize that Truth so as to manifest that very same Truth. Simply put, the knowledge and witness of the angels is the very same knowledge and witness of God. Essentially, these means do not have an independent existence; rather they function as mirrors by which Divine knowledge is reflected and emanated, without even the slightest interference by those mirrors. This is the true meaning of Divine Unicity, as is described in the Qur'an: *and not so much as the weight of an ant on the earth or in heaven escapes from thy Lord.*[102]

What could this mean? This means that the Apparent Book (*kitāb al-mubīn*), which is the entire realm of existence and all of creation, is God's knowledge. If true, then the knowledge of God cannot be other than the created world, this very engendered "book" of existence; the realm of existence and witnessing cannot thus be other than God's knowledge.

Or do they think We hear not their secret and what they conspire together?[103] This verse describes the angels as scribes of deeds. It says we are aware of all that which they hide and keep secret. In chapter 50, we read, *We indeed created man; and We know what his soul whispers within him, and We are*

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[102] Qur'an, 10: 61
[103] Qur'an, 43: 80

nearer to him than the jugular vein;[104] *and We know what his soul whispers within him...* Yet, while God attributes these actions to Himself, He also states, *When the two angels meet together, sitting one on the right, and one on the left, not a word he utters, but by him is an observer ready. And death's agony comes in truth; that is what thou wast shunning!*[105]

He attributes the recording and chronicling of the deeds to the angels. In other words: *the angels do what God does.* When they record and chronicle humankind's deeds, they are recording our knowledge. Our universal knowledge is manifested and reflected in these very forms and means, these very mirrors. Each angel manifests our knowledge according to its own capacity. Thus their knowledge *is* our knowledge.

What is even more interesting is that the clause *When the two angels meet together...* describes a causal relationship. Why are We closer to you than the jugular vein? How are We aware of all man's inclinations, all his thoughts and intentions, even the most insignificant flutter of the soul, all that is inspired by his self? It is through those two angels who meet together, accompany man on his right and left, record all his words and deeds, and attempt to protect him. Their recording and preservation is Our knowledge.

There are many such verses in the Qur'an in which the very same action is attributed to both God and to His creation. Indeed this is the very Reality of Divine Unicity. And man must pay attention to this Reality, and realize that at no time is he alone, and unseen. *What, does man reckon he shall be left to roam at will?*[106]

Man will be held responsible before God and will be questioned by Him for his actions. If he takes the path of righteousness and truth and always strives to be just, he will have journeyed in line with the very nature and essence of creation. And God will be his kind companion upon that journey and will respond to his pleas in his times of need. He will garner to his aid

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[104] Qur'an, 50: 16
[105] Qur'an, 50: 17
[106] Qur'an, 75: 36

and protection all the Divine spirits and all His legions of angels. All of creation will aid him, a creation that is all alive. For *With Us is a book recording.*[107] And indeed, the King of this realm is also alive and present. Man, then, must always tread the path of justice and righteousness. On this path of guidance and truth, he must be absolutely steadfast; guidance and truth must engulf his entire being, from his external actions to his thoughts, to the very sways of his heart. Simply put, man must fully realize the highest sense of the Truth, and abstain in the deepest sense from falsehood. Otherwise, when that Day arrives, he will be filled with utter remorse.

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[107] Qur'an, 50: 4

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Forty-Seventh Discourse

On the Body's Testimony on the Day of Judgment

God, the All-Wise has stated in his Noble Book, *Today, We set a seal on their mouths, and their hands speak to Us, and their feet bear witness as to what they have been earning.*[108]

Another category of witnesses on the Day of Judgment will be each individual's very own body. On that day man's own limbs will testify to his actions. Not that they will somehow come to literally speak with tongues; rather they will testify by presenting the act itself. They will demonstrate the actions that man committed through them in his life on earth. After all, these limbs—rather the entire body—will be animated on that Day. As the aforementioned verse states: On that Day, God will seal the tongue of the disbeliever, and the hypocrite so that they may not utter a single word, but *We will allow their arms to speak with us and their legs to bear witness*. Why is this? Why will their mouths be shut and the organs of their bodies testify? Since their tongues had become so accustomed to lying in this world, that lying became their nature and is now an essential part of their being. And they will lie despite the fact that that realm is the realm of absolute truth, where all is laid bare; a realm where none can hide or conceal the truth. Even in that realm they will emerge as liars and will have the strong urge to conceal the truth. After all, they died in a state where their tongues were habituated to lying and denying the truth. And if their own confessions were to suffice in that realm, this group would continue to deny their sins and would refuse to confess. Even there, some would either wholly deny or attempt to justify their actions and their lies. Various narrations state that these people will argue with and controvert God, exclaiming, "These angels who testify against us, they are Your angels and we do not accept any of Your witnesses!" And thus, God will

[108] Qur'an, 65: 65

seal their mouths so they can speak no more. And their bodies will begin to testify. The question is how this testimony takes place. Will their arms and legs grow tongues and utter sounds? What is meant by the body's speech is the re-enacting of that same act that the individual committed in this world.

According to the most valid and universally accepted definition of speech, the actual meaning of speech is to utter what is in one's mind and heart. In other words, the easiest way to convey to others what we have in our mind is through the power of speech by means of universally accepted concepts. Speech, then, becomes a means of revealing that which is hidden in the mind. When the Qur'an states, *And unto Moses God spoke directly*,[109] what could it mean for God to speak to Moses? Did God grow a tongue and literally speak with Moses? Of course not! God is not delimited by a body. Did He create a sound wave that scattered in the air and said "O Moses, I am indeed God"? If so, then this would not be God's speech. We would not call the simple creation of sound "God's speech"; it would not be attributed to God (in this way). You are the speaker only when you yourself speak, when you utter the words. Only in this instance will you be said to have "spoken." But if you constructed a machine that can speak, its speech would not be attributed to you *qua* speech. A speaker is only considered as such when the speech conveys that which is within his own self.

Then, the meaning of God's speech to Moses is that God communicated to him the sacred knowledge pertaining to Divine Unicity and the sacred laws, revealing to him a spiritual dimension that he did not previously know. It means that God bestowed upon him knowledge and understanding! God removed all the veils that were concealing the reality of things from Moses's spiritual senses, so that the veils cast by the material world that hide the Divine manifestation could not limit his vision. Moses was freed of all such limitations, and saw those manifestations as they truly are. His entire being was expanded to allow the Divine Will to enter, for that Divine

[109] Qur'an, 4: 164

Unicity to reflect in the mirror of his being, and for him to peer into and perceive their reflection. This is what is meant when we say God spoke to Moses, or for the tree, or, for that matter, any other creature in existence to speak and say, "I am God." Each being presents that Divine Reality in its particular way. All speech is thus a presentation of that reality according to its own capacity. For human beings this speech is communicated primarily through the tongue; for animals, through the various sounds they omit. For the tree it is communicated in a different manner, and even inanimate objects have their own particular means, all in accordance with their beings' potential. Even angels have a particular means of communication. Gabriel would come to the Prophet and speak. How would he come? Does he have a body? How does he speak? Is it through a tongue? No. Gabriel, one of the angels brought nigh, who spans the East and the West, is not material. Rather he is composed of a wholly different substance.

And thus, the speech of the body, of all the limbs and the various parts of the body on the Day of Judgment, are of this order. The body will present those deeds, both the good and evil, in their true form. This means that the person will himself re-enact those acts and present their true celestial reality. God states, *On the day when their tongues, their hands and their feet shall testify against them touching what they were doing.*[110]

This verse includes the tongue as a witness of man's deeds, even though the previous verse stated their mouths would be sealed such they could not utter a single word. This means that if at any point a man desires to conceal the truth of his deeds with his words, then his mouth will be sealed and he will not be able to requite himself of blame. His mouth will be sealed at that moment when he desires to lie and will speak when it needs to present his good or evil deeds, exposing the truth of what he committed. This is how the body will enact the celestial forms of each individual's deeds.

The following verses in chapter 41 deserve close attention: *Upon the day when God's enemies are mustered to the Fire,*

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110. Qur'an, 24: 24

duly disposed, till when they are come to it, their hearing, their eyes and their skins bear witness against them concerning what they have been doing, and they will say to their skins, "Why bore you witness against us?" They shall say, "God gave us speech, as He gave everything speech. He created you the first time, and unto Him you shall be returned. Not so did you cover yourselves, that your hearing, your eyes and your skins should not bear witness against you; but you thought that God would never know much of the things that you were working. That then, the thought you thought about your Lord, has destroyed you, and therefore you find yourselves this morning among the losers."[111]

It states that when the ears, eyes, and entire bodies of a man testify against him, he is astounded and shocked, and says to his own skin, "How could you testify against me? I did not expect that." After all, the skin on one's body is such an integral part of a person's being that no one would expect his own skin to testify against him in such a way. Then their skin will respond: "God gave us speech, just as He gave everything speech (on this Day)," meaning God made us speak out against you, that very same God Who has allowed for all things to communicate. *He created you the first time, and unto Him you shall be returned*, meaning that same God from Whom you came and to Whom you will return. It is He Who determines the beginning and end of all things. Your entire existence is an arch of perfection, a journey that proceeds from Him and returns unto Him. It is He Who made us speak, and God will exclaim, "You cannot refrain your body and its parts from testifying against you." And you thought that God was unaware of your deeds. What an unfortunate supposition! It has led to this utter loss that you must now suffer.

Firstly, we see that these verses single out the enemies of God (*a'dā' Allah*). No verse of the Qur'an states that the skin of the *believer* will bear witness against him. Rather this is something particular to those disbelievers and enemies of God and refers solely to the body of those who are unfaithful and

[111] Qur'an, 41: 19–23

sinful, not the believers. It states, *Upon the day when God's enemies are mustered...*

Of course this verse does make it clear that the Qur'an addresses not only the believers, but also the disbelievers. The disbelievers will also be questioned about their faith, about the foundational doctrines and rituals of religion, issues that range from the belief in the Divine Unicity to Prophethood, from the Resurrection Day to issues of practice, like prayer and fasting.

When the Qur'an speaks of the *skin of man* testifying against him, it uses a metaphor and is in fact referring to the loins of man. This is part of the Qur'anic etiquette, whereby it does not speak explicitly of such truly ugly acts like adultery. It rather speaks through a metaphor, only hinting at what is really meant. In some narrations, it refers to man's thighs, which also testify against him and his various sins. There is a narration from Imām Ṣādiq that states, "This [the Qur'anic verse] refers to the skin of the loins and the thighs."

Secondly, when the skin testifies against them, these enemies of God will say, *Why did you testify against us?* But those individuals will not be surprised in the same way when their eyes and ears testify because the skin's testimony appears quite strange: man does not believe the skin, a thing so close to him, to have a separate consciousness from himself, whereas he could accept this for the eyes and ears. We have some sense that the eyes and ears are particular entities; they can be separated from ourselves, and hence could have a separate consciousness. But on the Day of Judgment, when they are caught in those dire straits, even their skins will testify against them, a witness that will be very difficult for those enemies of God to bear. They will exclaim, *Why have you testified against me?*

And their skin will respond that this was not by our own volition. This is the Will of God, He who determines when each being must speak. We cannot do anything without His Divine Will. When He has us speak, no part of the body can refuse revealing the truth. All speak by and through Truth, through God Himself. This is in reality God speaking. His speech is manifested through us, and thus we are compelled to speak. Indeed He compels all beings to speak in this realm, for this is

the realm of Life. Thus all beings are alive here, and that Life is the Divine Life.

In the previous realm, you were heedless of God, thinking that He was unaware of your evil deeds. You assumed that God was unaware of your deeds and did not know about them. Yet you did not think that His knowledge encompasses that very action you thought He was unaware of. All actions rather are manifestations of God's knowledge, power, and Will. The Divine Attributes are manifested by these actions, and thus you cannot really separate the Divine from them. When God is closer to all beings than they are to themselves, how could He not be aware of man's actions? *But you thought...*: this is false conjecture; this is attributing partners unto God, when you misunderstand the true nature of the Divine Acts, resulting in that fiery damnation. *That then, the thought you thought about your Lord, has destroyed you, and therefore you find yourselves this morning among the losers.*

It is stated in a narration that "If this false belief is the reason why someone will be debased, then its opposite will bring salvation." This means that *husn al-ẓan*, "thinking the best of others," when referring to God, would mean assuming He knows all things. And this assumption, which is absolutely true, will bring salvation. This will lead to a person's being saved and his ascension to those heavenly stations. For this is what Divine Unicity really means.

Thus, the secret to all these deeds that lead one to Paradise, for them to lead to Heaven or not, is to know that God is aware of that deed and He sees and hears it. No matter how good a person's deed may be, if he is negligent of God, his act is entirely worthless, however valuable it may seem outwardly. Conversely, if he commits that same act and is conscious of God, his deed has an incredible reward. Why would this be? Because he is committing that act while fully aware of Him and with the intention of getting closer to Him, indeed seeing God in that act he commits. This is what Divine Unicity means in its truest sense. And only this act is accepted. If a person assumes God is unaware, then his assumption, which stems from his own ignorance, will lead him to Hell-fire.

This explanation makes it clear that all the realms of existence, including the material realm, are filled with life. Indeed all things are alive, as are all the parts of all beings, for all things bear witness. Witnessing has certain prerequisites. One must be firstly alive and secondly conscious to bear witness and testify to a deed. Witnessing itself implies that a person both is alive and knows what was committed.

The transcendental philosophers prove that all beings possess life, knowledge, and power. Existence itself requires these three properties. Every being that can be said to exist manifests these properties at a degree particular to that being's essence. These properties are not confined to humans, animals, and plants, those beings we ordinarily consider to have life. Rather even inanimate objects are alive, are conscious, and possess some power, all of which accord to their own essential limitations. All beings, whether objects in the world, or even time, space, and actions, possess these properties.

> The air, the wind, the fire and the earth;
> are servants, all, of their Lord.
> To us they look dead;
> but before God, they are filled with life and breath.[112]

Yes indeed, all beings are conscious and aware, even though we may not understand or comprehend it. We do not experience their being alive, because their world is entirely inaccessible to us. And yet existence indubitably necessitates life, knowledge, and potentiality. Therefore, the world of existence is filled with life, and every part of this very life, such as time and space, will testify on the Day of Judgment.

This world, this realm we live in, is replete with those three properties of life, power, and knowledge. And yet *You have been given of knowledge nothing except a little*."[113]

Ibn Sina (Avicenna) once said: "I attained such a degree of knowledge that I realized I do not know."

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[112] *Mathnavi*, I: 22

[113] Qur'an, 17: 85

With these meager resources of mankind, every existent thing and even every particle has its own mysteries and secrets that man with his limited capacity has no knowledge of. In the face of this incredible world, with all the knowledge and secrets contained within it, all the realities and forms of existence that comprise it, man's knowledge is as a drop in the ocean. He is as a single spark under the sun's rays, which has outshone even the largest galaxies containing the brightest stars. In other words, it is as though he knows nothing when compared to all that is knowable.

Man's condition is such that even if a person who is endowed with a great intellect spent his entire life in discovering the secrets bound in a single cell, he would still not have uncovered all of its hidden realities, and would still need to continue uncovering new truths about that cell, let alone all other realms of being and their origins, hidden realities, and final ends, the knowledge of which is exclusive to the Divine Essence, to Him Who knows all secrets, and Who knows the hidden realms. Moreover each existent thing's knowledge is limited to its own domain and even then only in a simple form of that reality and is utterly ignorant of the worlds of other beings.

The human being, who is the noblest of all creatures, has a distinction above all other creatures, namely his ability to mold and adapt to his environment. That potentiality, that ability of the human being, is what allows him to ascend various stations of perfection and attain higher levels of knowledge. Yet this should not mean that he can deny the life of all other beings in creation. *Nothing is, that does not proclaim His praise, but you do not understand their extolling.*[114] And, *The thunder proclaims His praise, and the angels, in awe of Him...*[115]

Indeed, we must understand that all beings, insofar as they exist, exhibit life, consciousness, and power. For they all proclaim His praise. And it is in and through these properties of life, consciousness, knowledge, and power that all beings be-

[114] Qur'an, 17: 44
[115] Qur'an, 13: 13

come like a mirror and reflect the Divine Being: *To God belongs the East and the West. Whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of God.*[116]

From this perspective, all of creation is unified as a part of that Reality. But creation appears differently if we see much of it as objects, as dead and unconscious. It is this other view of the world that the Qur'an rebukes when addressing the idol-worshipers. It tells mankind that if you understand yourself to be alive and conscious, and see these inanimate objects as lifeless and lacking any form of consciousness, you should not worship them, for this would be an abomination. It says, these idols are *dead, not alive; and are not aware when they shall be raised.*[117]

Then the reason man is not allowed to worship these idols is that he sees them as dead and unaware. Yet if he were to see all of creation as a reflection of Divine Attributes, as indeed signs of the Divine, it would not be such an abomination for him to give special recognition to the idols, just as he recognizes the Prophet and Imāms as reflections of that Divine Being. Recognizing God's creation in this way is in reality recognizing God Himself. Once their true natures manifest on the Day of Judgment these same idols that man worshiped while considering them dead will testify against him for his blasphemy: *And when mankind are gathered [to the Judgement] shall become enemies to them, and shall become deniers of having been worshipped.*[118] For while we worship them, these idols are praising God and are pleading to us to cease worshiping them. Yet we do not understand and continue our evil deeds, unaware of the reality of all things until that Day comes when our inner eyes are opened and we see these objects as they truly are.

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[116] Qur'an, 2: 115
[117] Qur'an, 16: 21
[118] Qur'an, 46: 6

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Forty-Eighth Discourse

The Testimony of Time and Space

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *Such days We deal out in turn among men, and that God may know who are the believers, and that He may take witnesses from among you; and God loves not the evildoers.*

This verse calls us to the Day of Judgment when even the "days" of this world are among the witnesses that will testify to what people have done within them. These very days and nights, and even each individual hour, bears witness to humankind's deeds; not just time, but also space—each individual place a person occupies—will witness and testify to what he does. To better understand this otherworldly reality, we need to preface this discussion with a few premises derived from both intellectual and textual evidence.

As was previously mentioned, Transcendental Theosophy demonstrates how each being possesses three qualities of power, knowledge, and life in this world—however insignificant it may seem to us now. Therefore, the entire realm of existence is comprised of these three qualities. Whatsoever is said to exist must also be alive; whatsoever is alive also has power and knowledge. These three define the actions and reactions of all people, animals, plants, and otherwise; both the animate and inanimate. They are present at all times, traversing all the various trans-substantial, atomic, or other motions. Their degree of power, life, and knowledge is in turn determined by their substantive potentialities and their capacity of their expansion. All beings are accounted for by this philosophy. This universal philosophical principle speaks for all beings without exception.

On the other hand, any being that has come into existence cannot thereafter be absolutely non-existent. In other words, a being cannot simultaneously be and not-be. Being and non-being are contradictory predications. Of course, they can both be predicated upon a being when specified in different ways, like

if an object is wood at time x, but later becomes ash. Yet when it is wood at that particular point in time it necessarily and forever exists as wood; whereas at another point in time, it necessarily and forever exists as ash. That predication becomes necessary to that being at that particular point in time and can never be divorced from it (it is now wood, necessarily).

Another issue is that when a thing comes into being, its essence also acquires a particular relationship with all other essences in the engendered world. Once a person exists, he simultaneously acquires a temporal, spatial, and essential relationship with all other essences. His essence acquires all these relational qualities. He becomes a temporal being; a being in a particular time, in a particular place, with a specific state. For example, a man is sitting in a mosque, next to the wall facing the direction of prayer (*qiblah*) and each side of these relations requires a complement for it to be realized. Both sides of the relationship need to exist for there to be a relation between them. And this goes beyond just the specific essence of each being; the accidents or effects of that being, which emanate from that being, are also necessarily related to all other existents. In other words, a person's actions are necessarily related to that particular time and place in which they were committed.

It thus becomes impossible for that being to be non-existent. With the very coming into being of that existent and its actions, it then becomes necessarily connected to all other objects, and these relations in turn also necessarily exist forever. And insofar as a being exists, it is composed of life, power, and knowledge.

From this discussion we can posit that the essences of all beings exist forever along with all their qualities, including those relational qualities. Because of their existence, they also possess knowledge, power, and life. And since these relations also exist, they also possess these tripartite qualities. In other words, this very moment we are located in and this place that we occupy have a certain consciousness. These walls are all alive and conscious in a real sense. And although we cannot perceive this because of our own physical limitations—despite their seeming completely inanimate and wholly dead to us—if

we were able to look at their reality, we would see that not only are they conscious, but they see and hear, and are aware. You can only imagine what an incredible sight it is! On the Day of Judgment, all these beings will appear in their true states, alive and conscious: seeing, hearing, and understanding what occurs around them.

> Wait till the rising sun of the Resurrection becomes manifest,
> that you may see the movement of the world's body.
> While they look dead in this world, all are alive in the next world
> They are silent here, but speaking there.
> Every particle of the universe in secret
> reminds you day and night [saying],
> "We are hearing, seeing, and jubilant
> with you, the uninitiated strangers, we are mute."
> Travel from the abode of the inanimate to the realm of spirit
> hearken to the loud voice of the particles of the universe.[119]

We cannot imagine ourselves in a place devoid of all consciousness and awareness, a space where we escape Divine Awareness, where we are hidden from the Absolute-Present, unless of course, we feign ignorance of what is real and true about this world. The truth is that time and space, and all other accidents, all have their own existence, and thus their own consciousness, power, and life. *By Him who knows the Unseen; not so much as the weight of an ant in heaven and earth escapes from Him, neither is aught smaller than that, or greater, but it is in a Manifest Book; that He may recompense those who believe, and do righteous deeds; theirs shall be forgiveness and generous provision.*[120]

When we contemplate these verses, they reveal the reality of Divine knowledge. Divine knowledge is this Existential Book, this very Realm of Being. All existent things are in themselves participating in that Divine Presential knowledge;

[119] *Mathnavi*, 3: p. 227
[120] Qur'an, 32: 3–4

they reflect that knowledge. Their very beings reflect that Divine knowledge. Thus, the entire engendered world and all of reality is the actualization of the Divine knowledge. God Himself states that He is the Knower of the Unseen, those hidden realms; nothing is hidden for or from Him. All such things are contained within and comprise that *Kitāb al-mubīn* ("Clear Scroll"), which is that Existential Book, that Spirit and Life-Source of all existence. He then states that the reward of the people of good deed is based on the very same Engendered Book. In other words, since all existent beings constitute Divine knowledge, therefore they all possess consciousness. All existent things give testimony on this day, and God will compensate the believers on the basis of these testimonies in the Hereafter. Among those witnesses are time and space.

Time and space are living and conscious and collect our thoughts and acts, safeguarding and concealing them for the Day they will be revealed. Today, the scroll is being collected; tomorrow it will be unfurled. Today, time passes, twisting around itself the scroll of actions, hiding them from view. Although we may not see those actions, they do not cease to be; they exist just as they were. And yet tomorrow time and space will unfurl their scrolls, revealing all that is bound therein, and man will witness himself surrounded by all his actions and thoughts, all of his own previous inner and outer qualities and states.

In this world, time, space and all other beings store the worldly reality of all our inward and outward actions, all our thoughts and intentions, and conceal them in themselves. Tomorrow they will reveal them once more, displaying their cosmic reality instead. In this world, when time and space gather and store these artifacts away, none can access them—except for a select few who are chosen specifically to have access to the Secret of God, Blessed and Exalted is He.

It is reported that Imām Ṣādiq once said, "Each new day that comes will tell the person living in it, 'O son of Adam, I am a new day. I witness what you do. Do good through me, and act good while you live this day. I will testify to your deeds

on the Day of Judgment. Thereafter you will never see me again until then.'"

In another recension, the *hadīth* states,[121]

> This *hadīth* informs us of the particularity of each day. Every day man lives, he is a new person. Therefore, he must do good on each particular day; otherwise that opportunity will be lost forever, for the next day is another dispensation and is also particular. An act committed on the next day will be exclusive to that time and cannot be deferred or attributed to any other. Hence, in another narration it is reported from Imām Bāqir who said, "When the night falls, it calls out in a voice loud enough for all mankind to hear, and all heed it except for the two precious things (*thaqalayn*, i.e. the Ahl al-Bayt). 'O son of Adam, I am a witness for all who live this night. So prosper and do good through me, for when the sun rises, you cannot commit any more good deeds or perpetrate any more evil through me.' And when the night does leave, the day calls out the same message."[122]

Imām Ṣādiq was once asked about the place of prayer, as to whether a person should designate a single place to pray or whether he should pray in different places. His Holiness the Imām replied, "No, rather you should pray here and there, for they will each testify for you on the Day of Judgment. Because each space will testify separately, you should pray in different places so they can all testify for you."

Of course, one question still remains that must be addressed, and that is the issue of repentance. What effect can repentance have on a man's destiny if all of time and space, all individual beings and particular places, record and safeguard his deeds and their spiritual qualities and will reveal all such deeds on the Day of Judgment? After all, a thing that *is* cannot cease to be, regardless of its goodness or evil; after a thing is realized, it cannot be naught.

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[121] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. VII, p. 325
[122] Ibid.

There is a *ḥadīth*, narrated from Mu'āwiya ibn Wahab, wherein he states,

> I heard Imām Ṣādiq once say, "If a servant of God truly and sincerely repents in the way God loves, He will conceal that evil deed from him in this world and the Hereafter." I asked, "How will He conceal that deed from him?" He replied, "He will cause the two angelic scribes to forget the deed they had recorded. He will secretly command the servant's body to hide his deed from him. And he will command that piece of land upon which he committed the act, 'Hide whatever evil he has committed upon you.' And when he faces God, on that Day, none will bring forth even a hint of the evil he committed."[123]

We can gather from the Imām's words that the repentance itself will shroud the evil deed, effectively concealing it. It means that repentance is itself an act. When realized, it exists in the world. This act, in its cosmic reality, effectually conceals that initial evil deed, hiding it from all other beings. Through these narrations the Imāms would bestow certain secrets to the earth itself, and would advise their closest companions—those companions to whom the Imāms entrusted their secrets—to do the same. Bukayr ibn A'yan reports another narration attributed to Imām Ṣādiq, who said,

> "Do you know what that [Black Stone] used to be?" I said no. He said, "It was among the great angels of God, the Glorious and Majestic. When God made the covenant with the angels, he was first among the angels to profess belief and accept the covenant; and so God made him His trustee among creation. God then made him swallow the covenant and called him toward Himself."[124]

Then the Imām recounts the story of the Black Stone, and concludes,

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[123] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. VII, p. 218
[124] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Vol. IX, p. 833

> And there were none more devoted to Muhammad and his family than that angel. Thus, God distinguished him from among all the other angels, and made him swallow the covenant, such that on the Day of Judgment, he will have a powerful voice, and an insightful vision. He will testify in favor of all those who abide by his right...and who held strong to the covenant.

After all, an angelic and purified soul will perceive these realities directly, whereas a heart darkened by sin will be devoid of all comprehension and will.

Ibn Abī'l-Ḥadīd narrates from Abū Sa'īd al-Khudari that

> We performed pilgrimage along with 'Umar in his first pilgrimage after he became caliph. When we entered the *Masjid al-Ḥarām*, he lowered his head to kiss and greet the Black Stone and said, "I know you are just a rock; you can neither benefit nor harm others; and if I had myself not seen the Prophet kiss and greet you, I would not be doing this now."
>
> 'Ali, peace be upon him, said, "O Commander of the Faithful, nay, rather the Black Stone does indeed bring harm and benefit. If you only knew the true meaning of the verses from the Sacred Text, you would attest to what I say, and know that the truth is as I say it. God says in those verses, *And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify touching themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes, we testify'*[125]—lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'As for us, we were heedless of this.' And so when he made them testify, and they admitted that He is their Lord, and that they are His servants and creation, He inscribed this covenant on a parchment and this rock swallowed it. Indeed, he has two eyes, a mouth, and a tongue by which he testifies to the *ḥajj*. He is the Divine trustee of this sacred place."

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[125] Qur'an, 7: 172

'Umar then responded, "May God not let me reside in a place where you are not present, O 'Ali! By God, may I always accompany you, O Abā'l-Ḥassan."

It is interesting to see how closely the words of the Commander of the Faithful correspond to the words of the Prophet, who said, "Send your greetings to the pillar of the Ka'bah (i.e., the rock), for it is the covenant of God among His creatures. He interacts with His creatures through it, as a master would with his servants, and knows who greets Him courteously and who does not."[126]

Indeed, different mosques and sacred places enjoy varying degrees of sanctity and different levels of spiritual rank. Their honor and sanctity is bestowed upon them by the spiritual stations of their founders, and illustrious worshipers and saints who beatify those spaces, and bestow a certain spiritual grace to them by simply being there and praying there. The prophets Ibrāhīm and Ismā'īl sanctified that space by their very act of building. The Prophet and his progeny beatified many spaces by their very prayer. Other spaces are sacred because an Imām is buried therein, because his archetypal blood has been spilt on that land and has in the process illuminated that space.

Ibn Abī 'Umayr narrates that he once told Imām Ṣādiq, "I dislike praying in non-Shī'ī mosques."

The Imām replied,

> Nay, you should enjoy visiting even those places. All mosques are built on the grave of either a prophet, or the martyred legatees of a prophet. A drop of their blood has spilled on that land. Because of this, God loves to be remembered in that land. So perform your canonical and supererogatory prayers in that space, and compensate for whatever prayers you have not done therein.

Indeed space and time become sanctified through the person who occupies that time or space. That is why it is said, "Noble space is due to the nobility therein. A place is great only

[126] *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām*, Vol. V, p. 102

because of the people who occupy it." The souls of these saintly people, the prophets and their legatees, sanctify and illuminate those spaces, making them platforms worthy of prayer. This greater sanctity comes through an increased consciousness and awareness that those spaces gain. Because the spiritual reality of knowledge and consciousness is light, as these spaces become more aware and increasingly powerful, they become increasingly illumined. This is what occurred with the Sacred Mosque of the Prophet and the mosques that were constructed around all the Imāms' graves. What makes particular times sacred, like Friday and its eve, Ramaḍān and other days throughout the Islamic calendar that enjoy a certain significance—what makes them really distinct is the people who participated in those days, and the events that transpired on those days. A mosque's sanctity increases with the increased purity of its founder; this sacredness grows as the worshipers of that mosque grow in sincerity and devotion. Mount Sinai became sanctified because it was where the light of God shone through Moses. It was through this manifestation of God's light in luminous beings of the prophets and their saintly legatees that a place became sanctified.

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Forty-Ninth Discourse

On the Testimony of the Qur'an on the Day of Judgment

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book,

When earth is shaken with a mighty shaking
and earth brings forth her burdens,
and Man says, "What ails her?"
upon that day she shall tell her tidings
for that her Lord has inspired her.[127]

Man will exclaim, "What is the earth doing?" The earth will speak on that day about all that transpired on it, all moments and events, whether great or small that transpired on it. It will tell of all that happened from the very first day it was created until that Day it was purified of all beings. The earth is aware and conscious; it witnesses now, and will testify [on the Day of Judgment] because your Lord has revealed His message while you were on this earth. And hence it can recount what it has seen. *Upon the day the earth shall be changed to other than the earth, and the heavens and they sally forth unto God, the One, the Omnipotent.*[128] And, *And the earth shall shine with the light of its Lord, and the Book shall be set in place, and the Prophets and witnesses shall be brought, and justly the issue be decided between them, and they not wronged.*[129]

On that Day, all of humankind will emerge from their graves, all those people who died, were buried a long time ago and recorded, interred, and forgotten; all those who resided under earth will be removed from their abodes; all those who were stored for later, will be restored now. It will be the time for them to harvest the fruits [of their actions]; they will emerge

[127] Qur'an, 99: 1–5
[128] Qur'an, 14: 48
[129] Qur'an, 39: 69

and reap the rewards of what they sowed: *Out of the earth We created you, and We shall restore you into it, and bring you forth from it a second time.*[130]

Why, they ask? *So that they can be shown the fruits of their labor.*[131] All of humankind, each and every group, each and every school of thought, each people and tribe, will emerge and will consolidate in their groups—the believers congregating with the believers, the disbelievers gathering among themselves. And they will all emerge from the earth to see the fruits of their actions. *Upon that day men shall issue in scatterings to see their works, and whoso has done an atom's weight of good shall see it, and whoso has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it.*[132]

We can learn a number of important lessons from these verses: firstly, the earth will relive and renew what occurred on it; it will recount what happened. Secondly, so far as it is true, speech corresponds to the thing itself. Thirdly, to exist means to know, to live, and to have power. Therefore when the earth speaks in its own language, it will present what is hidden in it.

The other important point in this verse is that the Qur'an says, *for that her Lord has inspired her.*[133] Revelation refers to the act of conveying the heavenly realities from the inner realm of dominion to the outward realm of the kingdom in accordance with qualities of every single thing. If the Qur'an says, *And thy Lord revealed unto the bees, saying: "Take unto yourselves, of the mountains, houses, and of the trees, and of what they are building. Then eat of all manner of fruit, and follow the ways of your Lord easy to go upon,"*[134] it is saying that God created it perfectly, in its essential qualities and its natural instincts and its abilities and inclinations. He created it in such a way that wherever it may find itself, whether in the loftiest mountains or the most verdant valleys, whatever edifice it

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[130] Qur'an, 20: 55
[131] Qur'an, 99: 6
[132] Qur'an, 99: 6
[133] Ibid.
[134] Qur'an, 16: 68

finds, it will construct the same hexagonal house, without hesitation or change. And this amazing creature, both in its origins and its continued existence, is due to God—meaning both that God created it, and that the Divine Presence continues to emanate existence, consciousness, and power to this being at every instance, allowing it to carry out its tasks with the requisite instincts, ability, and will. Extrapolating from this to what is revealed to the earth, God continues to emanate to the earth its ability to record the acts of man; to keep those acts unchanged and intact until the time comes for the Divine Judgment to proceed, and for the Ultimate Compensation. It will then be uncovered and presented to its owners. The people will emerge one by one. The earth will show each of them what he has done. Whether it is good or evil, each act will be preserved in that ultimate realm and it will not perish. It has, after all, drunk the elixir of existence. It is now alive; it cannot now disappear into the darkness of non-existence.

These verses also tell us of the relation between man and the earth. The earth will tell of that relation where a particular person committed to a deed. It will speak of those times in which a person committed that same deed, those times that are relevant to the deed. But any time or place that has no relation to us will of course not tell of our deeds. Therefore various units of time and space will speak of the relationship they have to a particular action and an individual person.

This was a basic and general philosophy of the testimony of time and space, of the earth and its constituent places. Now, in terms of the particularities of this philosophy, we must turn to the *ḥadīth* corpus, which is replete with narrations about the testimony of the time and places of worship, of the sacred pilgrimage and the rites of the *ḥajj*, or spending time and reflection in 'Arafāt and Minā. All these places are alive and all are illuminated with life and consciousness and animated with a soul. All bear witness to our actions. Indeed there are so many such verses that it becomes difficult to enumerate. And they are relevant and can be found in all the various categories of jurisprudence, various supplications, and chapters of the Qur'an.

In the chapter on canonical prayer, it is stated that the place where one prays will itself testify to the person's prayer. Each individual act a person commits will testify to being committed by the person who committed it.

The manner of testimony, what it means to witness and testify, how they witness and how they will testify, have already been discussed and do not really require further explanation. Suffice it to mention that the action itself is a being that exists in the real world, and abides by the universal principle that all things, including all acts, are *what they have forwarded and what they have left behind; everything We have numbered in a clear register.*[135]

An individual's deeds are acquired accidents in relation to the various forms that a person's body and being acquire, and as those forms pass, these accidents pass with them. In other words, those actions are the accidents of those forms, and their existence is connected to them. An act is necessarily connected to the particular form of our body that caused it and cannot be separated from it. Nor can it disappear into non-existence. Yesterday's actions are always connected necessarily to the past and cannot be pushed forward. It is inseparably connected to it and is indeed preserved in that form, whether for better or worse. Sahl ibn Sa'd narrates that "Gabriel came to the Prophet and said, 'O Muhammad, live as you will, [knowing that] you will die [one day]. And love whom you will, [knowing] you will separate. And do as you will, [knowing] you will be held responsible. Know that man's nobility is in night vigil, and his grandeur is in his needlessness of people.'"[136]

We have many *aḥādīth* about how the Qur'an will speak and bear witness on the Day of Judgment. For example, Sa'd Khaffāf recorded a narration from Imām Bāqir, who stated,

> O Sa'd, learn the Qur'an, for on the Day of Judgment, it will come in the form of the most beautiful person anyone has ever seen. All of humankind will be ordered in 120,000

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[135] Qur'an, 36: 12

[136] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. VI, p. 5

rows; 80,000 will be from the community of Muhammad; and the remaining 40,000 will be from all the other communities [that ever existed].[137]

The Imām speaks extensively therein of the status and station of the Qur'an on the Day of Judgment. He tells of how it shall appear in the guise of a true believer, passing in front of all the witnesses of the earth, from those of the lands to the seas, from the Divine prophets to the luminous angels. He speaks on the intercession of the Qur'an and how God has allowed it to intercede on behalf of whomever he sees fit, and about how the Qur'an is on that Day God's reason and proof against His creation, that its determining force will be held as the standard for all bounty and punishment. He describes how the Qur'an will save those believers who adhered to it and tried to preserve it, who guarded it and reflected upon it; those who truly read the Qur'an and who suffered such trials and tribulations to preserve it. One day the East and West will realize that the Qur'anic injunctions are the sole guiding light in a dark world.

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[137] Kulayni, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, vol. II, pp. 596–98

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Fiftieth Discourse

The Meaning of the Testimony of the Qur'an on the Day of Judgment

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *The day every soul shall find what it has done of good brought forward, and what it has done of evil; it will wish if there were only a far space between it and that day. God warns you that you beware of Him; and God is gentle with His servants.*

A day will come when men will encounter all good or evil deeds that they committed in their lives. On that day they will wish to be utterly dissociated from all the evil they have committed. While God warns them, He also reminds them that He is kind to all His servants.

In previous discourses, it was demonstrated how men's acts will be presented and will bear testimony—along with how the Qur'an itself will also testify. In the last discourse, we mentioned the *ḥadīth* narrated from Sa'd Khaffāf, in which Imām Bāqir speaks on the testimony of the Qur'an. He states how in that Final Judgment, the Qur'an will walk in the guise of a man in front of the multitudes, the rows of Muslims and non-Muslims, of all the witnesses from the lands and the seas, of the prophets and angels, all while manifested in the form of the truest and most devout believer. And as each of the groups lays eyes on the Qur'an, they will testify that they recognize this man and have seen him before in a very exalted station and engaged in the most profound form of *jihād*, and therefore his station is loftier than ours. Thus he now enjoys Divine Beauty and Goodness, a certain illumination and superiority that we do not. At this point, the Qur'an, perched just below the Divine throne, flings himself down unto the Earth. Then, an announcer proclaims: "Wish what you may! Intercede on behalf of whomever you wish, for you wish will be granted." At this point the Qur'an will face the believers, [i.e. the Shī'a]. Raising his head towards Heaven, his face pale and faint, he will call out to his

Lord, pleading Him to forgive all those who acted in accordance with the Qur'an. And God will fulfill his prayer, bestowing five specific gifts on those who believed and acted upon the injunctions of the Qur'an.

Towards the end of the *ḥadīth*, Sa'd, perplexed, asks the Imām, "Will the Qur'an really speak?" The Imām responds, "Of course the Qur'an speaks. And I can tell you what it says: *and perform the prayer; prayer forbids indecency and dishonour. God's remembrance is greater; and God knows the things you work.*[138]

When the Qur'an prohibits something, it is speaking to you. Indeed this corruption and evil actually refer to two specific people. And when the Qur'an speaks of the remembrance (*dhikr*) of God, it is referring to us. We are that greatest remembrance of God. Majlisī mentions this *ḥadīth* in exquisite detail, and comments upon the speech and witness of the Qur'an. He presents three possible meanings for the Qur'an's testimony and its utterance of the above-mentioned verse. First, the Qur'an's speech refers to its conveying its meaning and inner reality to the reader. Second, the Qur'an will manifest in the Hereafter in an imaginal body, and will communicate in a manner that corresponds to that realm. Finally, the manifested Qur'an mentioned here is an emanation of the purified Imāms as I understand it. Let us explore this final possibility further, beginning with two preliminary notes.

Firstly, the heart is the source of nutrition for all other organs in the body. In the same way, the soul emanates that inner reality and life to each individual. It is what really makes us human. The soul, once it is strengthened through worship and prayer, through contemplation and reflection, can attain the station of perfect faith. At that station, hidden realities will be unveiled for it. At this station, man's entire body will be sanctified and beatified—his ears, eyes, and tongue will become the ears, eyes, and tongue of God. That is the reason the Prophet said, "Beware! Fear a [true] believer and his discernment, for

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[138] Qur'an, 29: 45

he sees things with a Divine light." This is the station of detachment (*tajarrud*), which can only be attained through contemplation, prayer, and reflection. Indeed only a soul that is illuminated by Divine Light is truly alive. Otherwise, it is dead, even if the body seems to live and function. It is for this reason that the Qur'an declares all non-believers *dead and lifeless, even if they understand not: They are dead, not living, And they know not when they shall be raised.*[139]

Secondly, the Qur'an is beyond just a few words strung together and written down. The reality of its meaning is in fact profound. And only those who become intimate with the Qur'an, and resolutely struggle and understand it, can move beyond its outward meaning and attain those deeper realities. *Rather there are clear signs, held in the hearts of those who are bestowed knowledge.*[140]

From these two premises, we can arrive at the following conclusion: once a believer attains the station of faith and inner unveiling, and becomes intimate with the Qur'an, and its hidden spiritual realities are presented to him, and its truth permeates and manifests in his heart and soul, then his soul becomes [like] the Qur'an. His entire being becomes Qur'anic. This reality is attested to in many traditions of the Prophet such as the following: "The believer is more sacred than both the Qur'an and the Ka'bah (*al-mu'min-u a'ẓam-u Ḥurma min al-Qur'an wa'l Ka'bah*)." Why? Because the Qur'an that we read in this world is just a set of words on paper, pages bound in a book; the Ka'bah we make pilgrimage to is simply stacked rock and dried clay. The believer who reaches the station of faith and inner unveiling, however, embodies the *reality* of the Qur'an and lives and exists by virtue of the breath of the Qur'an in his being. He becomes the true Qur'an. Once the believer reaches a certain station of Divine knowledge (*ma'rifah*), he becomes the center around which all others circumambulate; he becomes the embodiment of the *reality* of the Ka'bah. Of course the true reality of the Qur'an and the Ka'bah are ultimately far

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[139] Qur'an, 16: 21

[140] Qur'an, 29: 49

nobler than the Qur'an and Ka'bah we read and visit in this world. It is for this reason that we say that he said, "I am the speaking Word of God," and we can say that the Commander of the Faithful is [like] the Qur'an, meaning that there is no spiritual reality manifested in the Qur'an that is not also manifested in Imām 'Ali.

There are other traditions that explain how the canonical prayer (*ṣalāt*) will walk on the Day of Judgment. What prayer do they mean? That prayer whose inner and outer reality is the greatest sacrifice of all pious believers, that prayer that is the nightly ascension of each and every believer, as the *ḥadīth* narrates: "*al-ṣalāt mi'rāj al-mu'min*"; that prayer in which one enters the Divine sanctuary, physically directed, mentally focused, and spiritually aware of the Divine Presence, like the prayer of the Commander of the Faithful, who embodied the reality of prayer. Indeed, in many commentaries on the Qur'an and narrations it is stated that, "We [the Ahl al-Bayt] are the canonical prayer (*naḥnu al-ṣalāt*)." After all, these realities find existentiation in other planes of existence, and their existence constitutes that being of the Universal Man.

The human soul is nobler and more exalted even than the angels. In reality, the only being more noble than and superior to man is God Himself. A person who can attain the station of perfection and actualize all his potentialities becomes the embodiment of the reality of the Qur'an and true faith and all virtues. All virtues become like a second nature to him, and such a person in fact is recreated with a different substance.

According to Majlisī, in his commentary on the *ḥadīth* of Sa'd Khaffāf, on the Day of Judgment the Qur'anic reality and the reality of prayer, charity, fasting, and commanding good and forbidding the reprehensible will be manifested in Imām 'Ali's essential reality. In sum, he is the reality of all the virtues and beautiful deeds. He is the realization of what it means to be *for God, in God, from God, and to God.* With this new perspective in light of the *ḥadīth* we can easily understand and resolve many such perplexing issues. If we were to take this existential metaphor further, the enemies of the Ahl al-Bayt become the sources of corruption, evil, and darkness. After all,

corruption also has a celestial reality and is present among the people. Some people are even loci of corruption; they exude evil. In the words of the Qur'an, they are the fuel for the Hell-fire, meaning that Hell exists by their very presence, and its fires rise by their very beings. Because of them, Hell becomes the locus of evil and corruption, and the source of shadows and darkness. Hence the reason the Imām is the reality of the Divine Scale and the Path towards Heaven and Hell, and that is the reason when we visit the shrine of Imām 'Ali, we read, "Peace be upon you, O ye scale of deeds, O ye who transform our states..." and "Greetings be upon that clear path, that illuminating star." He is in every way our Imām that we must follow. He is our archetype and our paradigm. We abide by his example, whether in ritual prayer, in *ḥajj*, in justice, or in belief in the Divine Unity. He is the Imām for all people and in all regards. He is also the Imām of the Qur'an. That is why he is called the Commander of the Faithful, and God in fact honored him and bestowed upon him this title. He has authority over each and every believer, in whatever time or place they live. He is the Imām and commander in an absolute sense, a man free of all blemish, purified of all imperfection. He has attained certainty in all matters of truth, and reached the highest peaks of virtue and righteousness. He has no doubt about what is true and good. He suffers no darkness or ugliness. He is imbued with the Divine hue. *We take our color from God, and who is better than God at coloring. We are all His worshippers.*[141] He is existentially pure and purified. Only such a person can become an Imām and Commander of the Faithful. Both Sunni and Shī'a sources narrate a tradition of the Prophet, who said, "God did not send down a verse unless it is said in its beginning that 'Ali is at its center and he is the leader of those believers."

This explanation enables us to better perceive those narrations and the nature of those moments when the Imāms lift the veil from their true inner realities. Yet their true depth will only be realized in the Hereafter. The Qur'an is in its truest form

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[141] Qur'an, 2: 138

formless and nondelimited and encompasses all realms. It cannot be confined to a particular body or vessel. For the Word of God is detached, which is why it is the Word of God. In the same way, man will perceive the true being of Imām 'Ali in his full glory, which is undefined and nondelimited. For 'Ali is all that truth is.

Indeed, the believers benefit from the Qur'an in accordance with the degree of their intimacy and engagement with it and act upon its injunctions. However much they immerse themselves in it, they will be saturated with its pristine waters to that same extent. However, if they seek to use the Qur'an for mundane pleasures, or to attain wealth and power, it will pull away from them to that same extent, and they will force it to testify against them in the Hereafter. Imām Ṣādiq warned believers and said,

> Heed the Qur'an. Learn from it and study it closely. Some learn the Qur'an so that others will declare, "He is a great chanter"; while others may learn to attain a beautiful voice, such that others will say, "He has such a beautiful voice"; while yet others learn the Qur'an, and uphold it day and night, and care not who knows of how they adhere to it.[142]

We must realize that as long as a person's soul is not transformed by the Qur'an, as long as he does not act upon its injunctions and fully realize its meanings in himself, he cannot experience the reality of the Qur'an. Indeed there are many who are well versed in the Qur'anic sciences, familiar with the commentary tradition, and yet their hearts are as dark as night, because they learn the Qur'an simply as a means to attain the pleasures of this world. No one should be fooled by their outward devotion to the Qur'an. Tabarsī, in his *al-Iḥtijāj*, narrates the following *ḥadīth* from Imām Riḍā:

> Imām 'Ali ibn Ḥusayn [Zayn al-'Ābidīn] once said, "When you see a person who has goodly manners and has taken a righteous mode, who appears humble in his speech and modest in his

[142] Kulayni, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, vol. III, pp. 608–9

deeds, then beware! O do not be deceived! Many are incapable of obtaining the world and not committing the illicit therein. Many are ill-intended, debased in condition, cowards at heart. They may establish religion, yet only as a trap [on their hunt for the world]. They relentlessly deceive men with their religious exterior, yet at the first chance to sin, they plunge. And when you see a person who abstains from illicit wealth, be warned! Do not be deceived! Each creature's whims and desires differ. How many recoil from even the greatest wealth, and yet are taken by a woman, even the ugly and vile, and commit a forbidden (*ḥarām*) act.

"And when you see someone recoil at this (sin), beware! Do not be deceived, until you have seen how his intellect binds him from evil. For how many entirely abstain from all these (sins), and yet do not return to a sturdy and balanced intellect. The corruption and evil they commit because of their ignorance is greater than the good they do with their intellect. And if you see his intellect is solid, then [still] beware! Do not be deceived, until you determine whether he permits his whim to reign over his intellect, or his intellect to control his whim. How much does he yearn for illegitimate power and status? Would he even renounce [all the good of the world] to attain [that illicit power]? There are some who, in hopes of gaining the world, forfeit both the world and the Hereafter. They sense that worldly power is sweeter than the pleasures of wealth, forgoing even the licit and permitted pleasures of the world. And there are others who abstain from all carnal sins in the hopes of power, until they are told, *Fear God.* And yet they are still taken by their own glory, a glory that was acquired through sin. Indeed they deserve Hell and have a place in there

"And so they stumble blindly, like a near-sighted camel. The first falsehood draws them to the furthest limits of perdition. Such a person will seek that which he does not have the capacity to fulfill, because of his unbounding infidelity, and God will goad him. He permits what God has forbidden and forbids what God has permitted. He cares not what he has lost of his religion if only he is able to sustain power, for which he will dissimulate. These are the ones towards whom God is wrathful, and the ones whom He curses. God's punishment and vilification awaits

them. And yet, the true person, the great person, the perfect man, the best human, is he who submits his desires to the command of the Divine, who utilizes his faculties entirely for that which pleases God. He understands that to be debased for adhering to the truth is eternally more glorious than to attain might through falsehood. He knows that the paltry pains that he suffers in this world will lead him to never-ending blessings in the next, an abode eternal and everlasting. And if he follows his desires in the abounding joys of this world, he will repay with a penance that never ceases or ends.

"*That is a true man and a great human being. Follow him closely, imitate his life, and emulate his conduct. Approach your Lord through him, for his prayers are never rejected, and all his requests are never left in vain.*"

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Fifty-First Discourse

On the Reality of Heaven and Hell and Their Meanings on the Day of Judgment

God, the All-Wise, says in His Noble Book: *Surely the unbelievers, who have done evil, God would not forgive them, neither guide them on any road but the road to Hell, therein dwelling forever and ever; and that for God is an easy matter.*[143]

There are more verses that further emphasize this end. *Muster those who did evil, their wives, and that they were serving, apart from God, and guide them unto the path of Hell! And halt them, to be questioned: "Why help you not one another?" No indeed; but today they resign themselves in submission.*[144]

These verses indicate that there is a path to Hell that unbelievers and oppressors will take and that will lead them to Hell. Indeed the term *ṣirāṭ al-jaḥīm* is one of the way stations on the road to Hell that the unbelievers and oppressors go through. This is also the path that the believers have to take to get to Paradise. This path is located over the road to Hell or within it. It is commonly called the Path and everybody has to pass through. The question is where the location of this Path is. Is it over Hell or through it? Does every individual have to pass through this Path or just certain people? Is there another path toward Paradise such that certain people can avoid taking this Path? What is the true nature of this Path? Why is it necessary to go through it to reach Heaven?

There is no doubt that in this world every move of every individual is for a purpose. Every man, intentionally or unintentionally, wishes to fulfill his physical and spiritual needs through his deeds in order to remove weaknesses from his body and soul.

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[143] Qur'an, 4: 168–69

[144] Qur'an, 37: 23–26

Every man is destined to leave this world sooner or later. During his life on earth, man journeys toward this goal. However, this is an inward journey. All human beings, of all races and ethnicities, believers or non-believers, go through this process of soul-searching to attain perfection. It is obvious that while all human beings share certain natural instincts, they possess different positive and/or negative attributes. For instance some were born brave, some cowardly; others are of moderate nature and some are extreme; some are generous, while some others may be stingy. Every man must try to nurture moderation in his soul and journey toward perfection.

The ideal human being therefore is a person who is neither aggressive nor passive, but moderate. Thus every soul has a path upon which he walks toward his Creator. The divinely inspired theosophers have said, "The paths toward God are as numerous as the number of souls." In other words, each soul has its own particular path toward God that is unique to itself.

In addition, prophets and friends of God (*awli'yā*) have suggested other inward paths that are accessible to human beings and are different from all other paths. All religions invite people to believe in Divine Unity even though they may differ from one another in the domain of form and law. Each religion has its own peculiar path, and the path of the Prophet of Islam is, by virtue of its finality, the most perfect of all. It denotes moderation in the human soul and shows man the straight path that is the shortest road to his destination.

It is mentioned in the Qur'an that Prophet Noah lived 950 years[145] among his people but could not accomplish what the Prophet of Islam accomplished in 63 years. Even though Noah was, in a sense, the grandfather of the Prophet, from a religious and spiritual point of view he was a novice in the school of *wilāyah* of Muhammad. How eloquently wrote Ibn Fāriḍ when he addressed this relationship:

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[145] Qur'an, 20: 14

Although outwardly I am the son of Adam
My inner reality gives a testimony that,
I am indeed his father.[146]

This is why the prophets appealed to the People of the Cloak to overcome unseen obstacles and to advance on spiritual stations. Since the inner paths are numerous, the Qur'an uses the Ways in the plural form (*Subul*). For example, it states, *But those who struggle in Our cause, surely We shall guide them in Our ways; and God is with the good-doers.*[147] In contrast, "the straight path" (*ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*) is one, as the Qur'an verse states: *Guide us in the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast blessed.*[148]

The phrase "straight path (*ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*) is mentioned 32 times in the Qur'an in singular form, denoting the existence of only one straight path, while the word "way" (*sabīl*) appears many times and in the plural form. It implies that there are a great many ways toward God, but there is only one straight path, which is the shortest way to God. All ways are valid as long as they are parallel with the straight path. As soon as they stray from the straight path, they lose their authenticity. Consequently, whether a man follows prophets or not, inwardly he is in a state of constant motion and change. This movement appears on Resurrection Day. We explained earlier that all terrestrial beings will appear in their heavenly form in the realm of Dominion. One of the terrestrial beings is our soul that journeys toward its origin where it appears in its heavenly form. Our mind indeed is a part of the worldly beings that move constantly and has its Dominion form as well. Thus, the path that man journeys in this world will be the *ṣirāṭ* in the Dominion.

Our world is the abode of illusions, lust, rage, and contingencies, where all the various beings relate to each other through these contingencies. The various entities are connected by these conventional relationships. Hell is the form that our

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[146] Ibn Fāriḍ, *Dīwān*, p. 105, verse 631 (from Tāiyyah Kubrā: *Naẓm al-Sulūk*)
[147] Qur'an, 29: 69
[148] Qur'an, 1: 5–6

world takes in the realm of Dominion. Moreover, the road to Paradise in this realm goes through Hell. Whatever separates man from God is Hell. The true meaning of the world (*dunyā*) is not living on earth, but it is living in the realm of attachments. Every man finds some attachments in this world that separate him from God. In the Hereafter this separation manifests itself in the domain of Hell. This is the message of these verses: *Not one of you there is, but he shall go down to it; that for thy Lord is a thing decreed, determined. Then We shall deliver those that were godfearing; and the evildoers We shall leave there, hobbling on their knees.*[149]

The first part of this verse clearly states that all human beings enter Hell without exception. The Prophet was asked if he would also enter Hell or not. He confirmed, adding, "We would pass through it as rapidly as lightning." The question is why and how does everybody have to enter Hell?

Hell is the symbol of this world, and all prophets, Imāms, and Friends of God enter this world first. To reach Heaven they must go through this world because anything that separates man from God is like Hell. What we mean by this world is not living on earth, but living in the realm of attachments. Attaining proximity to God is not possible without coming to this world first and struggling and after being purified, going through Hell in the Hereafter. Therefore, everybody has to go to Paradise through Hell. Prophets and saintly people come to this world first but are not attached to it. The world and all its belongings, such as family, wealth, and business, do not attract them and do not distract them from remembering God. The following verse alludes to their states: *Are men whom neither commerce nor trafficking diverts from the remembrance of God and to perform the prayer, and to pay the alms, fearing a day when hearts and eyes shall be turned about.*[150]

The Prophet lived on earth for 63 years but he was never attached to it. He was never preoccupied with the realm of contingencies. As we read in numerous narrations, they traverse

[149] Qur'an, 19: 71–72
[150] Qur'an, 24: 37

through this world, which is like a path as fast as lightning. Others pass through it in accordance with their deeds and the degree of attachment to the world. For example, to reach the station of union with the Beloved, the sincere believers go through many afflictions and trials, so they pass through this world [and Hell] as quickly as the wind. Some among the People of the Right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*) who did not commit sins in this world but did not experience intense love and attraction to the Divine and may not be so steadfast, pass through this path like a rider on a horse. Some among them who might have committed a few sins go through like a man on foot and experience the warmth of fire but enter Paradise without intercession. Others who committed cardinal sins but had strong will and repented, will be forgiven through intercession [of the Prophet or Imāms] and will walk to Heaven slowly and limping.

The infidels and oppressors fall into Hell and only God knows how long they will stay there. The time in Hell is in proportion with the degree of their infidelity or oppression. They will remain there till the fire purifies them. Also there are many who remain in Hell because the substance of their nature has already changed to that of fire. Those who leave Hell will make greater ablution in the Pool of Paradise (Kawthar) so that by the grace of *wilāyah* they will be purified and enter Paradise pure and clean. The above-mentioned discussion is all based on a statement by the Prophet narrated by Ibn Mas'ūd and recorded in *Majma' al-bayān*: "People enter and exit the fire in accordance with their deeds; the first group as fast as lightning, others like the wind, some others like a running horse, then like a rider, then like a running person, then like a man on foot."

In his commentary on the Qur'an, 'Ali ibn Ibrāhīm Qomi describes the path as follows: "The Path is narrower than a single hair and sharper than a sword." This is the straight path that 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib described and walked upon. This path indeed is very hard, sharp, and narrow. A person must be constantly conscious of the demands of his inward and outward life, be just, perform the duties of his servanthood to God, and observe all rules and requirements of struggle and wayfaring at every moment of life because the more one deviates from this

path the higher is the danger of being lost. However, the reality is that the human being must live in this world from which he would travel to other realms. If he lives like the prophets and the Imāms and walks on the straight path with sincerity, he will be saved. Otherwise, he will be lost. 'Ali was the perfect and true human being who lived like ordinary people and ruled over them in justice but was never captured by the world. His only intention was to please God. This is the criterion that sets Friends of God apart from other people. The deeds of God's Friends (*awli'yā*) are God-like, as the Qur'an states: *We take our color from God, and who is better than God at coloring?*[151]

Even though not every friend of God can attain 'Ali's station, if they follow his path it will become possible for them to go through Hell like lightning and attain the station of those who were purified by God (*mukhlaṣīn*) or those who were brought nigh to God (*muqarrabīn*). For them fire does not mean anything because they would be in the company of Imāms who guide them at every step. This is the meaning of the Imāmate. It necessitates submission and obedience to the Imām, for they themselves surrendered to God and the Prophet without any question, and their reward was the station they attained. This is the meaning of the "straight path" that we repeat in our daily prayer when we ask God to "guide us to the straight path."

The length of time it takes for one to go through the path depends of the degree of one's attachment to other than God. Going through this world and arriving in Paradise is a reality that is certain. We were in Paradise before coming to this world, but that was an unrealized truth. The Paradise that we will go to in the Hereafter is a truth realized as a result of our deeds. This comparison is like the example of a large apple tree and the seeds inside each apple. Each seed is potentially an apple tree (*potential reality*). It grows and becomes a tree and produces many delicious apples. This is a realized potentiality. Inside each apple there are many seeds. Each seed, therefore, is, in a sense, an apple tree, yet it is not. This is like our journey

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[151] Qur'an, 2: 138

from Paradise to this world. We must go through trials until we are prepared to go to Paradise in the Hereafter. Several Qur'anic verses describe this journey and the processes of transformation of our souls: *Or did you suppose you should enter Paradise without there had come upon you the like of those who passed away before you? They were afflicted by misery and hardship and were so convulsed.*[152] *Surely We will try you with something of fear and hunger, and diminution of goods and lives and fruits; yet give thou good tidings unto the patient.*[153]

Whoever goes through these trials and comes out triumphantly is closer to the straight path and the path of 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib. Anything other than God, even high stations, is a part of this world. The word *dunyā* means a lower plane of life; a person who does not devote his full life to God has a lower life in spite of possessing many virtues. This is the reason that although the "People of the Right" are saved, they pass through the path like a rider or on foot because they were not able to detach themselves from worldly attachments fully and therefore would experience the view of Hell and its unpleasant atmosphere. Those whose faith is not strong, who do not believe in the Day of Judgment and do not obey God's command, will deviate and get lost: *And surely they that believe not in the world to come are deviating from the path.*[154]

In contrast, those who were brought nigh to God (*muqarrabīn*) and the People of Good Deed (*abrār*) who had experienced the reality of fire (i.e. the attractions of the world) go through the Path like a fast-blowing wind, and if they are steadfast on the path they will be rewarded, as the Qur'an states: *Would they but go straight on the way, We would give them to drink of water copious.*[155]

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[152] Quran, 2: 214
[153] Quran, 2: 156
[154] Quran, 23: 74
[155] Quran, 72: 16

This is the path of 'Ali that is the path of the truth and that we follow (*ṣirāṭu 'Aliyuun ḥaqqun numsikuhū*). Only following the example of 'Ali in the most perfect manner merits us to gain the title of Shī'ite and enter the Paradise he talked about.

I would like to end this discussion with a story in order to understand the narrowness of the straight path. It is about Imām 'Ali, though it applies to all other guided Imāms. The late scholar of *ḥadīth*, Qomi, narrates in his *Maṣābīh al-Anwār*:

> One day, the Commander of the Faithful wished to eat a liver *kabob* and bread. For one year he resisted the temptation and did not share it with anyone. One day while he was fasting he shared his desire with [his son] Ḥassan. When the time came for him to break his fast a beggar came to him. He asked Ḥassan to give the food to the beggar, saying, "lest on the Day of Judgment we read in our Book of Deeds that we dissipated by consuming good food and enjoyed them."[156]

This is the straight path. We must remember that the man who made such a statement was the caliph of the Islamic Empire. On the basis of the Qur'an, the statement he made indeed demonstrates how punctual he was in observing the commands of God: *Upon the day when the unbelievers are exposed to the Fire: "You dissipated your good things in your present life, and you took your enjoyment in them; therefore today you shall be recompensed with the chastisement of humiliation for that you waxed proud in the earth without right, and for your ungodliness."*[157]

This is the exemplary life of 'Ali and the straight path of humanity. Now, you can compare this with the lives and behaviors of other companions of the Prophet or caliphs, whether they were just or oppressors. No one else among them left such an honorable legacy as 'Ali.

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[156] *Safinat al-Biḥār*, vol. 2, p. 458
[157] Qur'an, 46: 20

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Fifty-Second Discourse

Imām 'Ali and the Reality of the Path

God, the All-Wise, says in His Noble Book: *Guide us on the straight path.*[158]

There are two introductory points that help us understand the true meaning and reality of the straight path. First, every language contains words that denote universal meaning. For example the word "light" is used for various kinds of lights such as a candle, a lamp, the sun, and fire. They all share the universal meaning of light. The same is also true about the path (*ṣirāṭ*). The path is the medium that connects two things together, whether they are physical or material or imaginary and supernatural. It applies to different things like the road between two cities, the path between two celestial, metaphysical, or archetypal realities. It can be used for reading a book as a path to knowledge, trading as a way of life, farming as a way of earning a living, worshiping God as a way of knowing Him, and death as the path to the intermediate world. The real meaning of the path applies to all these examples truly and not metaphorically. Also, they are clearly different because the way to reach a city is different from the way to evaluate something; the way to reach God differs from the way to solve an algebra problem; and the way to Paradise is different from the way to answer a mathematical question.

Second, as the Qur'anic verses and the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet and narrations of the Infallible Imāms indicate, God assigned a specific path for human beings to attain perfection and find proximity to Him. He also warned us to avoid taking other paths. For example we read: *Say: "This is My Way. I call to God with sure knowledge, I and whoever follows after me"*[159] and *Surely thy Lord knows very well those who have*

[158] Qur'an, 1: 6
[159] Qur'an, 12: 108

gone astray from His way, and He knows very well those who are guided.[160]

These remarks allow us to conclude that the path of God is the way towards Him. Since God is not contained in time and space, here the path connotes a way from our soul toward the Almighty. Man goes through various phases and stations, emotional stages, from one idea to another, and from one perfection to a greater one to attain the station of the Foremost (*al-sābiqūn*) and those who were brought nigh to God (*muqarrabīn*). If a person is orthodox and pious, he might enter into the rank of the People of the Right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*) and by God's grace he can become one of those among the Most Perfect (*kummālīn*). Conversely, if he is guided by his carnal soul and Satan, he will enter the rank of the wretched and the People of the Left (*aṣḥāb al-shimāl*).

Every person has a path toward God within his inner being whence all deeds originate. That inner being is man's path (*ṣirāṭ*). Since each man's constitution is unique to him alone, he has his own distinctive path to God. This is the true meaning of the well-known statement, "The paths toward God are as numerous as the number of souls." These paths are the shortest in time and space when they are direct and lead man to reach God directly and immerse himself in His mercy and attain union with Him. This is the path of knowledge, and every infallible Imām is its guiding light. It can even be said that the Imām himself is the essence of the path and its outward actualization, and by the grace of his breath and attributes he guides the seekers to reach God through the fastest, shortest, and most direct path. The Imām's existence is a straight path toward God; it is sharper than a sword and narrower than a hair. Imām Ṣādiq said, "The [outward] form of the human soul is the straight path toward all goods. It is a bridge between Paradise and fire."[161]

In a previous discourse we mentioned that the path to Hell is in fact the reality of the different paths that people go through in this world. Although all paths go toward God, the closest,

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[160] Quran, 53:30.

[161] *Tafsir Safi*, vol. 1, p. 55. Published by Islamiyyah.

shortest, and fastest path is the path of the Imām, in accordance with the nature of time and space traversed. All other paths in accordance with their distance or proximity to the path of the Imām will be closer or farther from the straight path. This is the real reason that it is said the path of 'Ali is the straight path.

As we mentioned before, a man's path to God is the reality of his soul through which he reaches God. Since souls vary in the degree of their purity, sincerity, and egotism, their paths will be different from one another. The purer the soul, the faster will be its journey on the straight path. Among all the people, including the prophets, there is nobody superior to or even equal to the Noble Prophet, 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib, and the Immaculate Imāms, who are the embodiments of the reality of the straight path. This is the reality that a famous prayer alludes to: "You [the Prophet and the fourteen Infallible Imāms] are the firmer path, the witness to this transient abode, and the intercessors in the abode of subsistence [in God]."[162]

The reality of the straight path is that it leads man directly and without deviation to his origin in divine sanctuary, and actualizes man's potentials. Thus, *ṣirāṭ* is the path of return to the origin.

All human beings ultimately will reach God. However, since men possess different [God-given] qualities, and the manner of their struggle and the degree of their purity are different from one another, there are differences between those who reach God through the inculcation of the Divine Attributes of Beauty in their souls (*tajalīyāt-i jamālīyah*) and those who nurture Attributes of [Divine] Majesty or Power (*tajalīyāt-i jalālīyah*).

Man will eventually return to his origin, whether through "voluntary" or natural death. He will have Divine Qualities manifested in him one way or the other. This manifestation, however, varies in form and intensity in accordance with the perfection of a man's soul. As long as a man fights his carnal soul, does good deeds, and purifies his intention and soul, his path is straight. However, if his intention is not pure and his

[162] This is a part of *Ziyārat Jāmi' Kabīrah*.

deeds are tainted by the temptation of Satan and lust and appetite, he will be distanced from the straight path and will increasingly fall away further from God and into the dark abode of His veils. Therefore, the path is, in a sense, spiritual, and man goes through it with all his traits and attributes. In the process he abandons his selfhood, *innīyah*, and removes from his soul all material and intellectual pride and immerses himself in God fully and entirely. This is the process that the great Sufi Master Shaykh Maḥmūd Shabastarī described:

> Like Moses, son of Amran, press onwards in this road,
> Till you hear the words, "Verily I am God."
> So long as the mount of your being remains before you,
> The answer to "Show me" is "Thou shalt not see Me."
> The Truth, as amber, attracts you like a straw.
> If there were no mount of "youness," where were the road
> All the virtues lie in the mean,
> Which is alike removed from excess and defect.
> The mean is as the "narrow way,"
> On either side yawns Hell's bottomless pit.
> In fineness and sharpness as a sword,
> One may not turn round nor stand on it long.[163]

Eminent scholars and noble Gnostics in the Islamic world describe the processes of spiritual journey on the path and necessities of each station in various terms. All these stages and stations in reality pertain to the state of the soul. Muslim Gnostics and masters describe four stations for the journey of the soul, and our eminent philosophers and thinkers have followed their example. For example Mullā Ṣadrā of Shirāz writes,

> Know that there are four journeys before Gnostics and Friends of God (*awli'yā*). The first is journeying from people to God; the second is journeying in God with God; the third, that corresponds to the first, is journeying from God

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[163] The English translation is from E. H. Whinfield, London, 1880, reprinted 2012.

to people with God; and the fourth, which corresponds to the second, is journeying with God among people.[164]

The late theosopher and eminent Gnostic Akhunḍ Mullā Muhammad Riḍā Qumshe'ī made a few interesting remarks about the four journeys. According to him, the first journey, that is from people to God, is an attempt to remove both dark and luminous veils from the soul. The dark veils pertain to the carnal soul, while the luminous ones concern the heart and spirit. The wayfarer must go through the plane of psyche to the heart, then to spirit, and from there to his farthest destination (*maqṣad al-aqṣā*). There are, thus, three realms between the wayfarer and the reality of his soul. All veils that are mentioned in the sacred narrations or utterances of masters pertain to these three realms, that is, the realms of psyche, heart, and spirit. When the wayfarer goes through these realms, he acquires true knowledge of God's Beauty and annihilates himself in Him. This station is called *annihilation in Divine Essence*. Then the second journey starts and there are three stations in this realm, which are the stations of Divine mysteries (*maqām-i sirr*), the station of hidden mysteries (*maqām-i khafī*), and finally the station of absolute hidden mysteries (*maqām-i akhfā*). In consideration with the distinction between the realms of witnessing (*shuhūd*) and the intelligible world (*ma'qūlāt*) some Gnostics regard spirit as intellect, while some others consider them different abodes. Thus, the first and second journey include seven worlds, that is, the worlds of psyche, heart, intellect, spirit, Divine mysteries (*maqmām-i sirr*), hidden mysteries (*khafī*), and most hidden mysteries (*akhfā*). These seven worlds are the abode of love, as Rūmī says:

> 'Attar traveled through seven cities of love,
> but we are still stocked at the same first alley.

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[164] *Asfar Arba'a*, lithograph edition, vol. 1, p. 13

Thus, when the traveler transcends the realm of spirit and witnesses Divine Beauty and is annihilated in the Divine Essence, the last station of the first journey is complete, and he attains the station of *wilāyah*. In the process of the second journey, which begins in the world of Divine mysteries (*sirr*), man attains all perfections until he witnesses God's perfections and is annihilated in God's Names and Attributes and God becomes *the ear with which he hears, the eye with which he sees, the feet with which he walks, and the hand with which he touches.*[165]

The world of Divine mysteries (*'ālam-i sirr*) is the realm of annihilation in Divine Essence. The world of Divine hidden mysteries (*'ālam-i khafī*) is the abode of annihilation in God's Names, Attributes, and deeds. The world of absolute hidden Mysteries (*akhfā*) is beyond them both, where the Essence and Attributes are annihilated. In other words, the first is the world of annihilation in God's Essence; the second is the abode of annihilation in Godhead (*ulūhīyah*); and the third world is annihilation from those two annihilations, where the cycle of *wilāyah* is completed, and this is the end of the second journey. Hence, the first journey is going beyond the realm of corporeal (*nasūt*), Dominion (*malakūt*), and Invincibility (*jabarūt*). The second journey is traveling in the world of Divine Names and Qualities (*lāhūt*). In the third journey, which is journeying from God and with God to people, where the wayfarer is completely annihilated in Divine Attributes and finds subsistence in God, he journeys in the realm of Divine action and witnesses all previous worlds.[166]

According to 'Allāmah Mirzā Muhammad Noori, as long as a man has not started wayfaring actively, he always witnesses multiplicities and fails to see [God's] Unity. His preoccupation with multiplicity veils him from seeing Unity. When he begins to acquire knowledge, by seeing the effect, he sees the cause, and through the created he witnesses the Creator. Consequently, multiplicity begins to disappear before him and

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165 An allusion to the famous Ḥadīth Nawafil

166 Ibid., the detailed comment of page 13

is replaced with Unity. Now Unity veils him from seeing multiplicity. In this station he has transcended the world of multiplicity and is immersed in the world of Unity. As Mullā Ṣadrā describes this station, the travelers witness Unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in Unity. In other words, neither of these veils him from the other. In this station the chest of the wayfarer is expanded, and the knots on his tongue are removed, and he becomes the guide of other people in the world. This is the third journey.

The last and highest station is the most certain and perfect station, where the wayfarer sees the existence of God through God and in everything else, and there is no intermediary between him and God. This is the fourth journey by God among people.[167] It is often called the way of reasoning to prove God's existence (*burhan-i limm*) or the path of the sincere (*ṭarīqah-ye ṣiddiqīn*).

The perfect example of the one who traverses through all these stations of the four journeys in the most perfect way is the Imām, who exemplifies the straight path. The Imām is the embodiment of the straight path in the engendered world (*'ālam-i takwīn*) and is also the guide in the domain of the law (*maqām-i tashrī'*), as the Qur'anic verse states: *And that this is My path, straight; so do you follow it.*[168]

It is said that this path refers to 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib. It makes complete sense, because 'Ali is the supreme example of the actualized human being, second only to the blessed Prophet. Every ordinary man has the potential to attain this station, granted that he does not commit sins. Man is born perfect, but in the course of life he changes and yet struggles for perfection but often does not attain perfection. Actualized perfection is attained only by the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*).

It is said that "Wisdom is attaining universal knowledge in such a manner that man *becomes* and corresponds to the objective external world." A man of wisdom is the one who has a perfected human state and who embodies the world of intellect.

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[167] Ibid., see comments 16 and 17.
[168] Qur'an, 6: 153

Such a man transcends time and space and all kinds of attachments and limitations. He is the closest being to God and embodies His Supreme Name. His station is higher than any messenger and the angels brought nigh to God. There is no separation or distance between him and God. Since he has attained the station of subsistence [in God] after annihilation (*baqā' ba'd al-finā*), he becomes the embodiment of all Divine Names and Attributes. This is the most perfect station man can attain.

The perfect example of this human state [after the blessed Prophet) is the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib, who symbolizes the straight path by his exemplary life. He is the guide to Paradise and the bridge between Heaven and Hell. Indeed his very being attracts people to that supreme destination. This argument is based on many narratives that identify the Commander of the Faithful and his spiritual authority (*wilāyah*) and Imāmate with the straight path. These narratives are recorded in both Sunni and Shī'a sources. For instance, in *Ghāyat-al Marām* we find commentaries in verse 153 of chapter 6, verse 22 of chapter 67, and verse 74 of chapter 23 that substantiate this claim: *And that this is My path, straight; so do you follow it, and follow not divers paths lest they scatter you from His path. That then He has charged you with; haply you will be godfearing.*[169] And, *What, is he who walks prone upon his face better guided than he who walks upright on a straight path?*[170] *Assuredly thou art calling them to a straight path; and surely they that believe not in the world to come are deviating from the path.*[171]

There are also numerous *aḥādīth* that support the above argument. One such example is a *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Bakr, who heard it directly from the Prophet: "No one can pass through the Path without 'Ali's permission."[172] According to

[169] Qur'an, 6: 153
[170] Qur'an, 76: 22
[171] Qur'an, 23: 74
[172] Ibn Hajar Haithami Shafei, *al-Saqaiq al-Muhharaqah* (Egyptian publication) p. 78. This *ḥadīth* is narrated through various chains of transmission by both Shī'a and Sunni scholars of *ḥadīth*. See also several other *aḥādīth* narrated by 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, Ḥassan al-Baṣrī: "This is the path of 'Ali

this *ḥadīth* the only individuals who can pass this path are the ones whose words and deeds are like 'Ali's, even though they may not possess 'Ali's virtues and steadfastness. Otherwise, they would fall off the bridge, as the Qur'an states: *They will deviate from the path.*[173] This is the true meaning of the authentic *ḥadīth* recorded in both Sunni and Shī'a collections: "'Ali is the criterion who defines who will go to Heaven and who will go to Hell."[174]

'Ali is the supreme example of humility, orthodoxy, love of the Prophet, and obedience to God. Loving him and following his example—that is, the perfect example of the Prophet—leads man to Paradise, and animosity toward him leads to Hell, as the Prophet said: "Loving 'Ali is a virtue, and disliking him is a vice."

'Ali embodies all virtues and attributes that lead man to Paradise. His humility, truthfulness, courage, selflessness, love for the Prophet, and obedience to God are exemplary, as a result of which he reached the supreme station of subsistence in God and became the standard bearer of Imāmah. Whoever sets foot on 'Ali's path will, no doubt, pass through the Bridge and find his way to Paradise, as it is said, "No one can pass through the Bridge without 'Ali's permission."

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ibn Abī Ṭālib and his offspring. It is the straight path and upright religion; follow that and cling to it. Indeed, it is a clear path and never misleads."

[173] Qur'an, 23: 74

[174] This *ḥadīth* is recorded and narrated by several companions of the Prophet, including Ibn 'Abbās and Ibn Mas'ūd.

بسم الله الرّحمن الّرحيم

The Fifty-Third Discourse

The Path to Hell and the Road to Paradise

God, the All-Wise, says in His Noble Book: *Behold, Gehenna has become an ambush, for the insolent a resort, therein to tarry for ages, tasting therein neither coolness nor any drink; save boiling water and pus for a suitable recompense.*[175]

There are some verses in the Qur'an that, as we mentioned earlier, indicate that every man must enter Hell: *Not one of you there is, but he shall go down to it.*[176] In doing so indeed man obeys God's command, and then by his effort and struggle he starts journeying from the realm of Hell toward a higher plane of life and eventually enters Paradise, as another verse states: *If We had so willed, We could have given every soul its guidance; but now My Word is realized. Assuredly I shall fill Gehenna with jinn and men all together.*[177]

In many other verses, however, it is clearly stated that only unjust people and the oppressors pass through Hell. We must mention that there is a path whose ultimate destination is Hell and another path that goes through Hell and ends in Heaven. In other words, reaching Heaven necessitates going through Hell first. Those verses that state that all human beings have to go through Hell refer to the path that ultimately leads to Heaven. It is the path of perfection of the human state and the reality of *wilāyah*, even though it may go though many hardships, afflictions, and trials. Without overcoming the temptations of the carnal soul going through this path, which in the Hereafter is like a bridge over Hell, no one can attain high stations. The unjust and the oppressor must also go through a path leading to Hell where they ultimately face God's punishment, as the noble Qur'an states: *Surely the unbelievers, who have done evil, God*

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[175] Qur'an, 78: 21–26
[176] Qur'an, 19: 71
[177] Qur'an, 32: 13

would not forgive them, neither guide them on any road but the road to Gehenna, therein dwelling forever and ever.[178]

The oppressors according to the Qur'an are those who rebel against God, violate people's rights and honor, betray people's trust, and do not take care of the poor, the weak, and orphans, and in short, those who do not give people their dues.

Injustice against one's own soul means giving the carnal soul unbridled freedom to follow passion, appetite, rage, and the wasting of God-given talents in pursuit of lust and vain play, instead of attaining knowledge and traveling on the path toward moral and spiritual perfection.

As to committing injustice to God, it is rebelling against Him and His Prophet and Friends and not fulfilling duties that man has before God. Whoever commits injustice to God's Friends has committed injustice against God, for their hearts are filled only with God. A heart filled solely with God is God's sanctuary and a locus of His theophany, and loving and supporting it means loving and supporting God. All kinds of transgression and oppression originate from temptation of the carnal soul and enticement of Satan, which invite man to worldly adornments and illusive attachments. In the realm of contingencies we call this world social systems and civilization. As a result man gets away from the truth and paves his own way to Hell. The more he commits oppression and injustice, the farther he falls from the straight path.

There are many frightening valleys and slippery slopes on the path into which a man may fall if he is not cautious. Shaykh Ṣadūq, in the commentary that he wrote on Shaykh Mufīd's treatise titled *The Creeds* (*i'tiqādāt*), mentions that religious obligations and duties about which man will be questioned on Judgment Day[179] are likened to valleys that one cannot traverse through easily. These valleys include the valley of *ḥajj*, *wilāyah*, and other obligatory rituals that lead to Heaven, and the valleys of adultery, backbiting, and other forbidden acts that lead to Hell. By the grace of God a person can pass through

[178] Qur'an, 4: 168. See also 89: 14 and 78: 21.
[179] Qur'an, 37: 24

these valleys. Otherwise, he will slip and fall into the fire of Hell.

One of the valleys pertains to *wilāyah*, where one will be asked about the *wilāyah* of the Commander of the Faithful and other Infallible Imāms. The most important valley is the valley of *ambush* or *watch-tower.*[180] God said, *I swear by My honor and majesty that even very little oppression cannot pass Me [unless it is charged].*[181] The Qur'anic verse states: *Yet he has not assaulted the steep; and what shall teach thee what is the steep? The freeing of a slave, or giving food upon a day of hunger to an orphan near of kin or a needy man in misery; then that he become of those who believe and counsel each other to be steadfast, and counsel each other to be merciful.*[182]

As it is clear, these verses command man to pass these frightening valleys by performing good deeds, freeing slaves, feeding the hungry, supporting the orphans, and helping the poor, in a sense expressing the realities of the intelligible world in sensible terms. Imām 'Ali said, "There are formidable valleys and frightening stations before your steps ahead, which inevitably you have to arrive in and go through. Either God's grace will save you or you will fall down and be destroyed without having any choice."

Shaykh Mufīd then explains that mountains and valleys are used as metaphors for the hardship that man will face on the Day of Judgment when he will see the reality of his deeds, even though it is not always right to explain the invisible realm in terms familiar to human beings. This latter statement of the Shaykh pertains to the theological question of transcendent (*tanzīh*) and imminent (*tashbīh*), where some Qur'anic verses or *ḥadīth* explain God in anthropomorphic terms: *The All-compassionate sat Himself upon the Throne.*[183]

Since God is a simple Being, transcendent, nonmaterial, and out of time and space, "Divine throne" has a different

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[180] Qur'an, 89: 14
[181] *ḥadīth qudsī*
[182] Qur'an, 90: 11–17
[183] Qur'an, 20: 5

meaning, referring to His power and dominance over the World. As much as the throne reflects a king's power and majesty, God's throne symbolizes His power and Will that dominates over the engendered world. In this regard, Majlisī also follows Shaykh Mufīd's path and rejects applying anthropomorphic terms to explain the invisible realms where senses are absent. Otherwise, man will tend to interpret all invisible beings such as the *hawrīs*, palaces, gardens, and fire in anthropomorphic terms. It is true that in his dreams man often sees the realities of the archetypal world in material forms. For instance, knowledge appears in the form of drinking water or swimming in the ocean in dreams because knowledge is like water in blessing and generosity. Drinking milk in one's dream suggests acquiring Divine knowledge, or ablution suggests purification of the soul. These forms indeed belong to the intermediate world (*barzakh*) and possess forms there. As man sees realities that belong to the realm of intellect and his aspirations in his dreams appear in forms, his deeds including his prayer, fasting, *ḥajj*, and *wilāyah* also appear in their heavenly forms.

There are a few *aḥādīth* and narrations that must be mentioned here that explain different aspects of the straight path and the bridge to Hell. When the Prophet was asked about the Qur'anic verse, *Not one of you there is, but he shall go down to it*,[184] he said, "When those people are destined to enter Paradise, some of them will ask others, 'Did not God warn us that everybody enters fire?' The others will answer, 'You have entered while it was turned off [for you].'"[185]

As we mentioned before, fire symbolizes this world. The prophets and Friends of God entered this world, but they were not attached to it. Similarly, when they pass through Hell in the Hereafter, fire loses its burning quality because like their carnal soul that was under their control in the world, fire comes under their control in Hell.

Regarding the path through Hell, Imām Muhammad Bāqir states that when this verse was revealed: *When the earth is*

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[184] Qur'an, 19: 71

[185] Ibid.

ground to powder, and thy Lord comes, and the angels rank on rank, and Gehenna is brought out, upon that day man will remember; and how shall the Reminder be for him?[186] people asked the Prophet its meaning, and the Prophet said,

> Gabriel told him, "When God assembles the first and last people [on Judgment day], Gehenna [like a carriage] is brought forward, pulled by one thousand harnesses. Each harness is held by one hundred thousand strong and stern angels. Shouts and crying voices come from Gehenna. All the people die from fear if God does not keep them alive to examine their records. Then Gehenna raises its head and so sees, from above, all peoples, good and evil. There is no living being, nor an angel or a prophet who would not pray to God, saying: 'O my Lord! Save me.' And the prophet will say: 'My Lord! Save my community.' Then they will put the bridge over Gehenna that is sharper than the sword and narrower than a hair. There are in fact three bridges over it. One symbolizes trust and mercy, the second [daily] prayer, and the third symbolizes justice of the Lord of worlds. People will be ordered to pass over the bridge. Trust and mercy protects them here. If they are saved the prayer protects them on the second bridge. If they are saved they face the Lord of worlds. This is when God says, *God is on the watchtower* (89:14). People are on the path; some are hanging on, one step slide and one step stable. The surrounding angels will pray, 'O Patient God, forgive and forget, treat with regard to your grace, deliver peace, deliver peace.' People fall over each other crowded like butterflies. Whoever gets salvation through God's grace looks at Gehenna saying, *praise to God who saved me from you by His mercy and grace while I was hopeless. Our Lord is the All-Forgiving and the Appreciative.*"[187]

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[186] Qur'an, 89: 23

[187] *'Ilal al-Sharāyi'* narrates from Imām Ṣādiq on verse 24 of chapter 37, *And halt them, to be questioned* (37:24), that he said, "The servant takes no step unless he is asked four questions: how he passed his youth, how he spent his life, from where and on what he spent his money, and about loving us, the Household [of the Prophet]."

All these narratives make it abundantly clear that the path has an outward dimension and an inward aspect. Its outward dimension is the path and practices of the Imāms. Its inward aspect is the *wilāyah* that on the Day of Judgment will appear like a bridge over the fire to save people and prevent them from falling into the fire of Hell.

Muḥaddith Qomi once wrote that if you put together all the single letters that some chapters in the Qur'an start with (*muqatta'at*, i.e. *Ta Ha, alif, lām, mim*, etc.) and delete the ones that are repeated more than once, the following formula will come out that reads, *Ṣirāṭu Aliyyun Haqqun Numsikhu*, that is, "The Path of 'Ali is the Truth and we follow his path." God knows best.

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As to the verse *Guide us in the straight path*, Imām Ṣādiq gave the following comments: "This is the path to knowing God. It, indeed, consists of two paths: one in this world and other in the Hereafter. The path in this world is the Imām, who has to be followed. Whoever knows him here and follows his guidance, he will pass the path over fire in the Hereafter. Whoever does not know him here will fall down from the path into fire in the Hereafter." Other versions of this narration are recorded in several sources as well: "We are the straight path," "That is the Path of 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib," and "The Commander of the Faithful is the path," and the Prophet said, "They will be questioned about the *wilāyah* of the Commander of the Faithful." See *Biḥār al-Anwār*, lithograph edition, vol. 7, pp. 125–26. See also 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Insān Ba'd al-Dunyā*, unpublished treatise, pp. 32.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Fifty-Fourth Discourse

The Reality of Human Deeds on the Day of Judgment

God, the All-Wise, says in His Noble Book: *The weighing that day is true; he whose scales are heavy—they are the prosperers, and he whose scales are light—they have lost their soul for wronging Our signs* [188]

According to these verses the truth is real and is always actualized externally in one way or the other. In contrast, that which is false is illusory, based on imagination and illusion. The first belong to the realm of the truth and the second to the realm of falsehood. The Hereafter is a world of the truth, not illusion. It has its own scales and weighing. Those whose weighing is heavy will be saved, and those whose weighing is light will lose their souls because they did not believe in God's revelation. The term "scales" is used in its plural form to reject the idea that there is only one scale. It is emphasized that the plural form of the word "scale" denotes the multiplicity of human deeds, whereas the Truth is one, and therefore the "scale" must be one as well. The verse also mentions that those who are saved are the ones whose scale is heavy, but the evil-doers' scale is light. In other words, the Qur'anic verse suggests that good deeds are heavy and evil deeds are light. Other verses connote that that the evil-doers get nothing for their deeds on Judgment Day: *Say: "Shall We tell you who will be the greatest losers in their works? Those whose striving goes astray in the present life, while they think that they are working good deeds. Those are they that disbelieve in the signs of their Lord and the encounter with Him; their works have failed, and on the Day of Resurrection We shall not assign to them any weight.* [189]

According to another verse there will not be any scale for such people: *As for the scum, it vanishes as jetsam, and what*

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[188] Qur'an, 7:8–9

[189] Quran, 18: 103–5

profits men abides in the earth.[190] Moreover, other verses connote that good and heavy deeds go up, in contrast to evil deeds, which are light and go down: *To Him good words go up, and the righteous deed—He uplifts it.*[191] Good deeds give strength to man's soul and help it to attain proximity to God. *And God will raise up in rank those of you who believe and have been given knowledge.*[192]

In the material world anything that is light goes up and things that are heavy remain below. The question that is before us here is, Why is it that good deeds in the Hereafter that are heavy go up, and evil deeds that have no weight remain below? To understand this better, let us take a look at one more example. The Qur'an states, *We indeed created Man in the fairest stature. Then We restored him the lowest of the low save those who believe, and do righteous deeds; they shall have a wage unfailing.*[193]

It is clear from this verse that in the Hereafter the lowest abode is here below, where all evil deeds will go down while righteous deeds will go high up to the realm that belongs to the righteous and people of good deed. Thus, the material world is the opposite side of the world of resurrection. In the Hereafter everything will return to its origin. The more righteous the deed, the closer to God it will be; similarly, the more evil a deed, the farther its distance from God.

In order to understand how scales matter and operate in the Hereafter, here we need to explain two points. First, what does the scale mean? We discussed earlier how terms and words are related to their universal meaning rather than to their specific and individualized features. In his introduction to *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfī*, Mullā Muḥsen Fayḍ Kāshānī argues that scale (*mīzān*) is a term related to measure and is a criterion to calculate something. This is the reality of a scale. It may be applied to many different entities, some of which may be material and physical

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190 Qur'an, 13: 17
191 Qur'an, 35: 10
192 Qur'an, 58: 11
193 Qur'an, 59: 4–5

and some others spiritual. Therefore, anything that is used to calculate or measure something is a scale. This includes old-fashioned scales with two plates, an astrolabe to measure altitudes or the location of stars, a plummet, or a simple ruler to measure the length of something. The science of prosody is used to measure the rhythmic structure of poetry (*'ilm al-'arūḍ*), the science of logic measures philosophical arguments, our senses measure our perception [of smell, imagination, etc.], and the Perfect Intellect is the criterion to measure all things.[194]

The second point is articulated in Fayḍ's commentary on verse 9 in chapter 7 of the Qur'an according to which God decides the scale on Judgment Day for a human's deeds and his state. According to Fayḍ the scale for everything is in accordance with it. Therefore, on the Day of Judgment man's faith, and his words and deeds will be judged in accordance with the scale established to judge them. These scales are established by the prophets and their legatees. A man will be judged in accordance with the degree of his obedience to and observance of those criteria and how closely he followed the prophets' path during his life on earth. Hence each community's deeds will be weighed by its prophet, his legatees, and those who upheld his path and protected his tradition. It is narrated that when Imām Ṣādiq was asked to comment on verse 21 in chapter 48 (*And We shall set up the just balances for the Resurrection Day*), he said that the scales of justice on the Day of Judgment are the prophets and their legatees. In a related narration he added, "We are the scales."[195] It is, therefore, safe to conclude that the scales for humanity are the prophets, their legatees, their manners, and the way they journeyed on the path toward God. Every individual of every community in the past and in the future will be judged by their scale.

The universal meaning of the term "measure" applies to all things. Obviously, criteria to measure things in the realm of spirit are unique to that world. What scale do we use to measure one's love, or humility, sincerity, courage, or devotion? How

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[194] *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfī*, vol. 1, p. 19
[195] Ibid, vol. 1, p. 565

do we determine the qualitative or hierarchical value of these traits in people? On the Day of Judgment it is these traits and qualities that matter and not physical weight of a thing or a person's deed. What will be counted is how sincere, humble, righteous, or godfearing one was, and on the basis of that one's station in Heaven or Hell will be decided. When he was asked to comment on verses 8–9 in chapter 7, Imām 'Ali said, "All good as well as evil deeds will be weighed. The good deeds will make the scale heavy and the evil deeds make them light."[196]

The criterion that is used on the Day of Judgment to measure each community's righteousness, patience, justice, submission to God, bravery, and other virtues is the standard set by its prophet and the sacred book God sent down through him to His servants. For Muslims the Prophet and his progeny embody those virtues in the most perfect way. Their very being and the standard they set in servanthood to God, dedication to people, and all virtues they possessed are the scales to assess Muslims' deeds.

In his *Kitāb al-Iḥtijāj*, Ṭabarsī narrates that Imām Ṣādiq was asked how one's deeds could actually be weighed. He replied, "Deeds are not material and corporeal things to be weighed or measured. What will be measured is man's motivation and his intention behind his deed. One weighs something when one is not aware of its weight. God knows everything and need not weigh man's deeds."

Then people asked him what "scale" means in this context, and he replied, "justice." He was then asked what the Qur'anic verse means when it says...*he whose scales are heavy...* He said, "These are the people whose deed is closer to justice. In other words, whoever's deed is closer to justice, his scale will be heavier, and whoever's deed is far from justice, his scale will be lighter."[197] Justice is keeping moderation in every step of life and avoiding extremes. For example, courage is a virtue,

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[196] Ṣadūq, *Tawḥīd*, p. 268, as quoted by *al-Mīzān*, vol. 8, pp. 16–17

[197] Ṭabarsī, *Kitāb al-Iḥtijāj* as quoted in *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 7, p. 243

but two extreme opposites of it are temerity and procrastination. A brave man is neither reckless nor hesitant. Man's other qualities are likewise appreciated if he follows the path of moderation. Also good attributes are accepted when they appear for the truth. The scale of justice is the same as the scale of the truth. Truth and justice are in fact one and the same. The reason that good and truthful deeds are heavy is that they lead to justice.

The above discussion makes it clear that two groups of people have no scales, and their deeds will not be weighed. The first group includes those who exaggerated in doing evil deeds to the extent that *all* their good deeds will be null and void (*ḥabṭ*), and they do not have any good deeds to be measured. About them the Qur'an states, *Those are they that disbelieve in the signs of their Lord and the encounter with Him; their works have failed, and on the Day of Resurrection We shall not assign to them any weight.*[198] The second group includes those who went beyond struggling against their carnal souls and attained the station of perfect sincerity and purity. They are those who were annihilated in God and entered into the rank of those who were purified by God (*mukhlaṣīn*) and were brought nigh to Him (*muqarrabīn*). These are those servants of God who transcended the realm of multiplicity and attained the highest station in the realm of *tawḥīd*. They set fire to all multiplicities and illusions. Since they were annihilated in God, all their deeds were in God. They did not possess independent existence, or any deeds to be weighed. They left it all to God, and as the Qur'an says, *Those shall enter Paradise, therein provided without reckoning.*[199] They will be the companions of the Infallibles and God's Friends whose very being embodies truth and justice. Whoever becomes annihilated in God and frees himself from all chains of existence and assumes the "color of God" will enter in a realm where there is no duality; and intense love consumes the lover and annihilates him in the Beloved.

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[198] Qur'an, 18: 105

[199] Qur'an, 40: 40

Thus, there will be no scale for those who were annihilated in *wilāyah*. This is the true meaning of the poem:

> Love for ʻAli is like a shield.
> He divides Paradise and Hell;
> he is true legatee of Muhammad;
> The Imām for man and *jinn*.[200]

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[200] This poem was composed by ʻAmmār ibn Taghlabah

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Fifty-Fifth Discourse

Prophets and Imāms Set the Standard for Measuring Man's Deeds

God, the All-Wise, says in His Noble Book: *Then he whose deeds weigh heavy in the Balance shall inherit a pleasing life, but he whose deeds weigh light in the Balance shall plunge in the womb of the Pit. And what shall teach thee what is the Pit? A blazing Fire!*[201]

God created everything in accordance with measures He decides. He created the prophets and Imāms in accordance with certain principles and measures and placed them as models to be emulated by man. There are many Qur'anic verses that describe these principles and measures on the basis of which the universe was created and its balance maintained: *And heaven—He raised it up, and set the Balance. Transgress not in the Balance, and weigh with justice, and skimp not in the Balance.*[202]

God created the universe with a purpose and sent down revelations to establish the truth and justice on earth. Man is expected to act in accordance with these principles and base his deeds on the attainment of the truth: *God it is who has sent down the Book with the truth, and also the Balance. And what shall make thee know? Haply the Hour is nigh.*[203] *Indeed, We sent Our Messengers with the clear signs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance so that men might uphold justice.*[204]

In the preceding discourse we concluded that each community (*umma*) shall be judged by the measure set by its prophet and his legatees. Thus, the scales to judge the people of the final revelation are the noble Prophet, the Commander of the

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[201] Qur'an, 101: 6–11
[202] Qur'an, 55: 7–9
[203] Qur'an, 42: 17
[204] Qur'an, 57: 25

Faithful ('Ali), and the Qur'an, which is described as the following: *Falsehood comes not to it from before it nor from behind it; a sending down from One All-wise, All-laudable.*[205]

We shall describe in detail how the scale works in relation to the Muslim community. There is a great deal of disagreement among Muslim theologians and commentators on the Qur'an as to how the scale works. In my humble opinion based on Islamic sources the scale is a real object, and the term is used in its universal and not metaphoric meaning. According to the views expressed by the Shī'a and Sunni scholars, the scale refers to the manners and behaviors of the prophets and their legatees. In contrast to Shaykh Mufīd, we believe that the term is used in its literal, non-metaphorical meaning; some other scholars maintain that the scale only implies magnificence and majesty of Judgment Day. Others thought the scale was a metaphor describing the balance between the actual deeds and punishment or rewards for them. Although the scale is used in its literal meaning, according to many traditions it does not mean that they will place the good deeds on one plate and the evil deeds on the other, and that prophets and their legatees will simply be present there to observe. *They are indeed the scales.* Therefore, this scale does not work like worldly scales used to weigh properties in this world. The noble Qur'an uses two terms referring to that scale and balance: the first is *justice*, which appears in the following verse: *And We shall set up the just balances for the Resurrection Day, so that not one soul shall be wronged anything; even if it be the weight of one grain of mustard-seed. We shall produce it, and sufficient are We for reckoners.*[206]

Another is the *truth* which is mentioned in this verse: *The weighing that day is true.*[207] Thus, the scale of the truth is the same as the scale of justice, as several traditions point out as well. There is a difference in meaning between justice and the

[205] Qur'an, 41: 42
[206] Qur'an, 21: 47
[207] Qur'an, 7: 8

truth in the sense that the first refers to complete equality between two things in every respect, while truth denotes the criterion that defines justice.

There is a rule in the science of Qur'anic commentary according to which some Qur'anic verses in fact interpret other verses. Thus, the scale on the Day of Judgment is both justice and truth. Justice means a total equality between two things, but the truth (*ḥaqq*) means actualization and realization of justice. Therefore, justice comes after the truth. I would like to continue this discussion through analyzing the truth in this context.

The truth is a reality, and so it has weight, while the false has no weight. The more good deeds a believer does the heavier will be his scale, and that elevates him to higher stations. This is in contrast to the physical world, where the heavier side of the scale stays lower. There are several Qur'anic verses that refer to the majesty and the weight of the faithful in contrast to evil deeds that carry no weight. Therefore, on the Day of Judgment good deeds take one up and closer to God, whereas evil deeds and sins distance one from God, the Supreme Truth. The realm of the Supreme Truth is the abode of life, power, knowledge, light, and transcendence and detachment, and darkness has no way toward it. The evil-doers, who commit satanic deeds and whose souls become demonic, cannot enter there. They remain far away, falling down into Hell, which is the abode of ignorance and misery. Such people did not commit good deeds in the world to raise them up in the Hereafter. The Qur'an many times uses terms *ḍhalal* and *iḍhlāl* in referring to them. The first means being lost, and the second losing the [Straight] Path. They imply that the evil-doers will be lost before reaching the truth, the light, and the ultimate reality. They cannot stand the realm of the light, and absorb the lights of God's Majesty and Glory. Many Qur'anic verses declare that the unfaithful, polytheists, rebellious evil-doers, and the like have no status and weight, and they will burn and perish

before reaching the Majesty of God's Light: *Whoso associates with God anything, has gone astray into far error.*[208]

The Qur'an uses the plural form of "scale," *mawāzīn*, in order to highlight that each deed requires a particular scale. For example, daily prayer is a scale that helps man to attain perfection and closeness to God, as the *ḥadīth* explains: "The prayer is a scale; whoever fulfills the commitment to it, it will fulfill the commitment in return."[209]

An authentic *ḥadīth* narrated on the authority of Imām Bāqir states, "There is no way shorter to leave Islam than leaving the obligatory prayer intentionally or not taking seriously the performance of it."[210]

The love for the Prophet and his family adds weight to one's deeds and makes one's scale heavier. Imām Bāqir narrates another *ḥadīth* to explain the significance of the love of the Prophet and his Household in the following terms: "Love for me and my progeny will be helpful on seven stations where there is great fear and trepidation. Those stations are the moment of death, on entering the grave, on the Day of Resurrection, on the occasion of one's seeing one's Book of Deeds, on the moment of reckoning, and in passing over the Bridge."[211]

To these Imām Sajjād adds a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet according to which nobility of character and a good manner make one's scale heavier: "The Prophet said that on the Resurrection Day nothing can make an individual's scale heavier than a good manner and attitude."[212]

Love for the Prophet and his family gives the deeds credibility and weight. Imām Bāqir narrated the words of his grandfathers from his father, who said, "The Prophet said, 'Loving me and my family benefits you in seven very crucial and shocking moments: dying, entering the grave, rising from the grave,

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208 Qur'an, 4: 116

209 Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Maḥ'hjat-ul-Bayḍā*, vol. 1, p. 353

210 Ibid., p. 340

211 As quoted in *Biḥār al-Anwār*, 7: 248

212 *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, published by Haidari, vol. 2, p. 99

receiving the record, getting the account, before the scale, and before the Path.'"[213]

Shaykh Ṣadūq narrated a discourse that the Commander of the Faithful presented in response to a person who claimed that the Qur'an contained contradictions:

> ...[the various Qur'anic verses refer to multiple situations;] when it states, *And We shall set up the just balances for the Resurrection Day, so that not one soul shall be wronged anything* (21:27), it means the scale of justice that everybody will be judged with on the Resurrection Day. God will treat people according to their relationship with justice. Another *ḥadīth* according to him states that these scales are the prophets and their legatees.
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> When the Qur'an says, *and on the Day of Resurrection We shall not assign to them any weight* (18:105), it refers to particular people.
>
> When it states, *those shall enter Paradise, therein provided without reckoning* (40:40).
>
> According to the Prophet, peace be upon him, God, Majestic and Glorious is He, said, "I put My honor and My love to one who cares of Me and loves Me for My Majesty. They will have shining faces on the Resurrection Day and will be taken to high stations on pulpits of light and will be dressed in green clothes."
>
> The Messenger of God was asked who these people were. He replied they are neither prophets nor the martyrs; they are those who love others for the glory of God. They will enter into Paradise without reckoning. We ask God, Majestic and Glorious is He, to put us among them for His mercy.
>
> When the Qur'an states, *Then he whose deeds weigh heavy in the Balance but he whose deeds weigh light in the Balance* (101:6–8), it refers to counting when evil and good

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[213] *Biḥār al-Anwār*, lithograph edition, vol. 7, p. 248

deeds will be counted. The good deeds make the balance heavy and the evil ones, light.[214]

Accordingly, this *ḥadīth* rejects the idea that any contradiction exists between the above-mentioned verses of the Qur'an. In addition, it explains why some people enter Paradise without reckoning. Their love for God is only for God's sake, and their only objective in loving Him is attaining proximity to Him. What they earn in this *transaction* is nothing but God Himself. Their *blood money* is God Himself, as we read in the famous *ḥadīth qudsī*.[215] These are the people who enter Heaven without being questioned and get annihilated in the luminous presence of God. Similarly, they are evil-doers who will enter into Hell without being accounted as well. Imām Sajjād said, "O servants of God! You must be aware that [on the Resurrection Day] the scales will not be put or the records be released to the polytheists; they will go toward Hell as a group. The scales will be put and the records will be released to people who surrendered. O servants of God! Fear God."[216]

Thus, on the Resurrection Day people will be rewarded or punished in accordance with their scale of deeds. Except for the two above-mentioned groups, all other groups will rewarded or punished after their deeds are weighed. On such a day blood relationship or social status have no role, and ordinary worldly criteria do not apply. The only thing that counts is spiritual achievement and truthfulness. Spiritual realization is measured on the basis of their reflection of the luminosity of the realm of the truth. The Qur'an states, *For when the Trumpet is blown, that day there shall be no kinship any more between*

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214 Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 268.

مَن طَلَبَنى وَجَدَنى، و مَن وَجَدنى عَرَفَنى، و مَن عَرَفَنى احَبَنى، و مَن احَبَنى عَشَقَنى، و مَن عَشَقَنى عَشَقتُهُ، و مَن عَشَقتُهُ قَتَلتُهُ، و
من قَتَلتُهُ فَعَلَى دِيَتُهُ، و مَن على دِيتُه قَتَلتُهُ، فَانا دِيَتُه.

"He who seeks Me finds Me, He who finds Me knows Me, he who knows Me loves Me, and he who love Me falls in love with Me, and he who falls in love with Me, I fall in love with him. And he whom I fall in love with, I kill, and whom I kill his blood money is on Me, and I am his blood money."

216 Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Resaleh Me'ād*, lithograph edition, pp. 33–34

them.[217] On that day the real scales are the prophets and their legatees, and each community will be judged in an accordance with practical and spiritual criteria set by their prophets and Imāms, and will be punished or rewarded accordingly. They are the proofs of God who are channels of emanation of [Divine grace] and in charge of guiding the people will be the scales of judgment. This is the true meaning of this Qur'anic verse, *That whosoever perished might perish by a clear sign, and by a clear sign he might live who lived.*[218]

The deeds of some people are so pure and luminous that even angels cannot attain their high station. Those deeds belong to the believers who are selfless and immersed in Divine love; they yearn to meet their Lord as no other reward may be worthy of them. Those believers have turned their minds and hearts away from the world and have detached their whole being from the realm of existence. Since they have forgotten their identity and worldly existence and have been annihilated in God, their reward will be nothing other than God Himself. It is this purity of intention and immersion in seeing God that bestowed on the deeds of the Master of Believers Imām 'Ali such nobility that that the Prophet proclaimed, "One stroke by 'Ali on the day of [the Battle of] Khandaq is more precious than worship of man and *jinn*."

Since in his deed 'Ali did not do, see, hear, or say anything other than God[219] and was fully annihilated in Him, his action in that battle was praised to the extent that he became the *scale* by which all deeds are measured; "Peace be upon him who is the scale of all deeds."[220] 'Ali indeed is the scale for the deed; the real straight path; the scale to separate those who go to Par-

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[217] Qur'an, 23:101

[218] Quran, 8: 42

[219] This is an allusion to 'Ali's famous statement when that he said, "By God I saw nothing unless I saw God before it, with it and after it."
و الله! ما رايت شئي الاّ و رايت الله قبلهٗ و معهٗ و بعدهٗ.

[220] This statement comes from The *Ze'yarat-e Mutlaqeh* dedicated to Imām 'Ali.
السلام على ميزان الاعمال

adise and those who go to Hell. He is the center, a man of Divine knowledge and embodiment of *wilāyah*, and he is immersed in love of God. He is the one in whom love of God became his nature; for his whole being was for God. Indeed men like him who were annihilated in God and found subsistence in Him became the scale for all humanity, as Ibn Fāriḍ so eloquently wrote in his poem,

> If you see some people spend their wealth on God's path
> you will find them sacrifice their lives for Him without hesitation
> By my life! Only they are the true lovers of God
> The rest of men only pretend to be in love;
> what a useless claim this is.[221]

Behold! Who brought good qualities to humanity more than 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib and his infallible offspring, the Prophet's daughter, Fāṭimah Zahrā and her daughter Zaynab Kubrā? They brought to humanity the gifts of purity of intention, mind, heart, and soul, and also nobility, chivalry, forgiveness, charity, love for God's glory, servanthood, and wide knowledge. Hence Muslims stand before 'Ali's blessed shrine and recite,

> Peace be upon him who is the scale of all deeds, and the transformer of hearts.
> Peace be upon him who is the clear path, the enlightening star, and the fire against those who insult the truth.
> God's blessing and grace with him.

Thus, these men and women are scales for and witnesses to their community, but, as the Qur'an says, people like 'Ali are a witness not only to the many nations but also to all prophets, as the Qur'an states: *How then shall it be, when We bring forward from every nation a witness, and bring thee to witness against those?*[222]

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[221] Ibn Rariz, *Dīwān*, Lamiyah, p. 174

[222] Qur'an, 4: 41

To put it in philosophical language, the honor of all philosophers of the East, Ibn Sīnā, wrote, "Among all companions of the Prophet, 'Ali was like the Intelligible among the sensibles."

* * *

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Fifty-Sixth Discourse

On the Reckoning on Judgment Day

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *And fear a day wherein you shall be returned to God, and every soul shall be paid in full what it has earned; and they shall not be wronged.*[223]

One of the stations of the Day of Judgment is the reckoning of deeds, wherein all the actions of and behaviors of each individual will be accounted for. *Whether you publish what is in your hearts or hide it, God shall make reckoning with you for it. He will forgive whom He will, and chastise whom He will; God is powerful over everything.*[224]

Many verses of the Qur'an describe this stage and process of reckoning, each using a different tone and description, drawing out the various aspects and forms of that process.[225]

The following verse describes the actions of the disbelievers, acts that have no positive reality, and thus no foundation and basis in that realm. And so, their state on the Day of Judgment is compared to a person who drank his fill of water, but is still parched: *Nigh unto men has drawn their reckoning, while they in heedlessness are yet turning away.*[226]

The reckoning on the Day of Judgment is indeed very close. In truth, humankind is never separated from nor far from its reckoning. Even if we supposed that there was something that causes the reckoning to be distant and far away, as each individual marches along, he is also walking ever closer to

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223 Qur'an, 2: 281

224 Qur'an, 2: 284

225 See for example 24: 39, *And as for the unbelievers, their works are as a mirage in a spacious plain which the man athirst supposes to be water, till, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing; there indeed he finds God, and He pays him his account in full; and God is swift at the reckoning.* See also 21: 2 and 55: 26–27.

226 Qur'an, 21: 2

death. With each step that our lives take, we get ever closer to that impending reckoning. After all, that annihilation is actually written on our foreheads, as the Qur'an says: *All that dwells upon the earth is perishing, yet still abides the Face of thy Lord, majestic, splendid.*[227] We will all return to our Lord, and will have to face our own reckoning. However distant it may seem, it is always nigh. However, people are neglectful and heedless. They try to escape from the truth, and flee from reality.

The Reality of Reckoning

The question that is posed here is what is the essence of this reckoning? What is the reality behind it? Reckoning is, fundamentally, the clarifying or uncovering of a quantitative unknown, through a set of knowns. And based on both the known and the unknown factors involved in the process, the reckoning will be more or less complex. For example, it is easy to divide 12 apples between 3 people. But dividing that same apple between every single individual in the world is much more complicated. So now how do we calculate every single individual's deeds and behavior, from the very beginning of his responsible "adult" life, until the very end? And we must consider not only their deeds, but also their behaviors, thoughts, dispositions, and beliefs. This would be a very complex and strange accounting indeed! Who could possibly accomplish such a task and account for all these variables except *God, who is indeed swift at the reckoning*?[228]

Since reckoning is fundamentally the discovering of a quantifiable unknown, it would mean the individual doing this reckoning is first in a state of ignorance about that quantity or result. And through applying the processes and methods of reckoning, he can enter into a state of knowledge regarding that result, once, of course, the previously unknown quantity becomes known. But if we were to exit out of that condition of

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[227] Qur'an, 55: 26–27
[228] Qur'an, 24: 39

ignorance and live in a state of consciousness and knowledge from the very beginning, reckoning would on its face become entirely meaningless. The realm of the Hereafter is primarily a manifestation of all that is true and real. It has no place for knowledge and ignorance. There, accounting in terms of uncovering or discerning an unknown quantity would be meaningless. In the engendered realm, one set of things causes another and is prior to it. And each thing has its own set of effects and outcomes. This law creates a vast chain of beings that results in things being both causes and effects. God has established specific effects for each substance and being He has created. When a tree is planted, its environment allows that tree to grow and actualize its full potential. It will in turn bear fruit and be the cause for another set of effects. In the same way, prayer, fasting, charitable giving (*infāq*), and other good acts each have their chain of existential imprints and consequences. Cultivating familial bonds is determined to lead to a longer life. Charitable giving will increase the goodness and blessings a person sees in his life. Conversely, forgoing this charitable giving will result in a decrease in livelihood and an increase in the difficulty that a person must face.

We must see whether God's knowledge depends on and requires this broad and deep chain of beings, of causes and effects. Does God's knowledge function like our knowledge and our ignorance, both of which depend on this chain, so that it needs some form of reckoning to discern that quantitative unknown?

God's knowledge of creation is actually presential and not acquired. Knowledge is divided between the presential and the acquired. The latter, acquired knowledge, is knowledge of things fundamentally external to the subject's existence, which are thus not known through the existence and person of the subject. This category of knowledge is when a certain conception of the known object appears in our mind, like the number of people who are participating in a gathering. This knowledge is external to our being. If the necessary conditions for that conception did not appear in our mind, we would not have any

knowledge or understanding of that object. This is acquired knowledge.

The second category of knowledge is presential. It is our knowledge of our "self," of our senses, feelings, potentialities, and faculties. Even our knowledge of our faculty of memory and of contemplation are both presential; neither can be separated from us. Wherever we are, in whatever state we are, we are aware of our selves, of our beings, and of our "self-ness." Hence the knowledge of the soul to its "self" and its different states and conditions is presential.

The question is: Is God's knowledge of things and beings acquired or presential? Meaning, did He at some point in time discover and acquire knowledge of the world? If yes, this would require God to be deficient in a thousand different ways, including His being ignorant and contingent. God's knowledge of things is presential; the externally existent beings of the world are by their very existence the knowledge of God. God's knowledge of a mosque, for example, is none other than the reality and existence of the mosque itself. And this is the case with all existent beings; the engendered realm is by its very existence part of Divine knowledge. Thus, any action committed by any actor is by itself the object of God's knowledge. Just as our "self" and our faculties and states are not hidden from us, and we know them presentially, so does God know presentially His "Self" and His Names, Attributes, and Actions. And insofar as the engendered realm is the result of Divine Acts, He also knows the engendered realm presentially. *And not so much as the weight of an ant in earth or heaven escapes from thy Lord, neither is aught smaller than that, or greater, but in a Manifest Book.*[229]

Divine knowledge of the "Manifest Book" is thus presential. Once this is understood, then mental conception and consequently reckoning are irrelevant and negated with respect to God. After all, there is nothing unknown to God for Him to uncover or discern. Therefore, the rules and process of reckoning and calculation would then also be meaningless for God,

[229] Qur'an, 10: 61

because they are not discovering any unknown. The very actions of human beings are created by Him, and their effects arranged by Him; therefore both their actions and their effects are known presentially by Him.

So then why reckoning? This reckoning is in reality for the ignorant, so that they may understand the conclusion, both the consequences and repercussions; so they may understand that God's blessings and punishment are based on His mercy and His justice, and neither are dispensed whimsically or without a precise measure. Just as, in a classroom, the subject of a lesson is abundantly clear and present to the teacher, and entirely unclear and unknown to the students, so are all things abundantly clear and present to God. This is the "swift reckoning."

God is the true and Absolute Possessor of all things, whether it be the Day of Judgment or anything else. The reckoning is therefore not for God. It is actually for us, who find ourselves in the state of ignorance or knowledge. God is indeed "the Master of the Day of Doom..." The Qur'an states it in this way to illustrate that it is on that Day that people will truly realize the depth of what this statement means.

Basically every action has an effect, regardless of whether it is good or evil, which is correlated to the action itself. Many Qur'anic verses attest to this reality: *Yet had the peoples of the cities believed and been godfearing, We would have opened upon them blessings from heaven and earth; but they cried lies, and so We seized them for what they earned*[230] and *Whatever affliction may visit you is for what your own hands have earned; and He pardons much.*[231]

These and many other verses indicate quite clearly that every single action of human beings has certain effects and will lead to certain consequences; and they command that man should never disregard or be neglectful of the results of his actions and behaviors.

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230 Qur'an, 7: 96
231 Qur'an, 42: 30

Indeed, many of the great Muslim masters of virtue and gnosis would always control their behavior and undertake intense reckoning of themselves and scrutinize their own actions. Whenever they would misstep, or have a lapse in their judgment, they would try to identify the cause of such errors in some previous moment of neglect or dereliction they had committed. These effects of our actions are present to us in this world. In the Hereafter, we will face another set of effects—those results that are particular to that realm. Among the Qur'anic verses that speak to the causes and effects of human actions is the following: *And still the unbelievers are smitten by a shattering for what they wrought, or it alights nigh their habitation, until God's promise comes; and God will not fail the tryst.*[232]

The following narration, which is attributed to Imām 'Ali ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā, addresses the same issue: "Whenever human beings originate a sin they had not previously known, God originates for them a calamity they had not previously recognized."[233] That is not to say that man will face all the consequences of his actions in this world, nor that all the recompense of our actions will be fully realized here. In fact, many people will not see the results of their actions in this world. These individuals will face those consequences, in their most perfected forms, in the Hereafter, wherein the true reality of that individual will be revealed. Others, however, may feel the consequences of their actions here in this world, regardless of whether those consequences are good or evil. Still some others may feel them while in the throes of death, before they depart from this world to the next. This is because the intermediary world (*barzakh*) is fundamentally a continuation of this world, and the Day of Judgment in turn a continuation of that intermediary world. These three realms are actually composed of a single reality, and are all part of the same existential continuum. They set the groundwork for the trajectory of human perfection. Thus, if some of the recompense for one's actions is

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232 Qur'an, 7: 96

233 Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, n.p.

dispersed in this world, it will be deducted from the amount in the Hereafter; if withheld in this world, it will be entirely dispensed in the Hereafter.

Indeed, we have particular narrations that indicate how believers will be tried and tested in this world, for example through illness, poverty, and so on. In the process, those believers will be purified of their sins, such that they will be able to enter Paradise directly because they have already attained the station of purity. These narrations also inform us that the disbelievers will not receive their punishments here. Their lives will primarily be filled with ease and happiness, as they blissfully continue to gather greater wealth and prestige. For this group, all the reward of their evil is stored away, preserved for the Hereafter; as the *ḥadīth* states, "If the world were in God's opinion worth even as much as a mosquito's wing, He would have not allowed the disbeliever to drink even a sip of it." And the Qur'an states: *If God should take men to task for their evil-doing, He would not leave on the earth one creature that crawls; but He is deferring them to a term stated; and when their term is come they shall not put it back by a single hour nor put it forward.*[234]

It should be noted that actions do not independently produce their effects, nor do these effects arise of their own accord. Rather, just as God has created all of creation in His compassion and effulgence, He has also coupled these actions with their attributes and effects such that they arise necessarily. It is with God's bestowing His abundant grace upon those actions that they have gained the potential to produce those effects. All beings, in fact, by their very being, seek from their Lord to produce effects, just as, by their very existence, they seek from their Lord to be sustained. They yearn for that Divine munificence, which allows them to continue to exist. Therefore, this reckoning and these rewards are like provisions and sustenance; or better said, they are one and the same and receive sustenance from the infinite ocean of Divine mercy. These two needs of all beings, of being sustained and of seeking effects

234 Qur'an, 16: 61. See also 35: 45–46.

for causes, are in a very precise and rational way, identical. The clouds of Divine munificence continually draw water from the infinite waters of the Divine Truth and Reality. Then, by showering that munificence upon the contingent world, it satiates it. Therefore, any raindrop that descends on the earth is an aid and support for that drop that preceded it. The second drop provides strength and reinforcement for the first. Through it, the true needs and prayers of the previous drop are answered. At the same time, it serves as the preceding drop's reckoning. Therefore, just as God continuously sustains all contingent beings through His munificence, and all contingent beings need that sustenance,[235] so does He bestow on the created realm continuously that reckoning and those consequences of their actions.

The following narration is mentioned in *Nahj al-Balāghah*:

> 'Ali was asked, "How will Allah reckon the deeds of His creation, in all their plentitude?"
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> He replied, "Just as He gave them their sustenance in all their plentitude."
>
> Then he was asked, "How will He reckon when they do not see Him?"
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> He responded, "Just as He gave them their sustenance while they do not see Him."

These words of the Imām, in all their concision and terseness, contain a world of profound and invaluable spiritual meaning. First, sustenance and recompense are in essence identical. They only differ in terms of the perspective or frame of analysis; if analyzed from one perspective, it would be called sustenance, and if analyzed from another, it would be called reward. Any action we commit will have some consequence; this consequence you can either name sustenance or recom-

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[235] *And in your selves; what, do you not see? And in heaven is your provision, and that you are promised.* Qur'an, 51: 21–22.

pense. If you do your canonical prayer with sincerity and presence of heart, you will enter a sublime state. The sublime state is a consequence and result of that prayer, as it opens the door to the heart, engaging that faculty of goodliness and sublimity therein, allowing the Divine inspirations (lit. breaths) to enter the heart, and strengthening that individual's connection to his Lord. Thus is the sustenance that the Divine has determined for that individual. God has indeed said, *We will give you sustenance according to whatever you seek and desire, and whatever oaths you abide by.*

Unlawful (*ḥarām*) sustenance is a result of illicit acts, and lawful (*ḥalāl*) acts are a product of lawful acts. If you attend gatherings wherein Divine sciences are discussed, you will attain that spirit of understanding and recognizing those verses and traditions. They will be your sustenance. But if you partake in a gathering wherein backbiting and gossiping ensues, wherein lying and conniving are rampant, wherein the rights of other human beings are repressed, so that corruption is done on the earth, then your sustenance will also be a direct result of those actions, namely all the putrid and rotten foods of the low-self, and those demonic thoughts and illusory realities. You will reap what you sow, as the Qur'an says: *Whosoever desires this hasty world, We hasten for him therein what We will unto whomsoever We desire; then We appoint for him Gehenna wherein he shall roast, condemned and rejected. And whosoever desires the world to come and strives after it as he should, being a believer—those, their striving shall be thanked.*[236]

As the verses denotes, God will honor whatever request any creature makes and He is not miserly in His beneficence. God's objective is to be munificent in terms of both bestowing mercy and existence in accordance with His servants' intention, capacity, and request. Whoever wants this world, God will give it to him. Whoever is seeking the Hereafter, He will bestow it upon him. Of course, each of these desires is different from the others; each will have particular repercussions and conse-

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[236] Qur'an, 17: 19–20

quences, regardless of whether they are immediate or more distant. And those who seek will have to face the repercussions of what they sought based on their desires and their intentions. This is one of God's traditions, one immutable and unchanging. In this world, a person reaps what he sows. In this regard, Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī says:

> From the lawful morsel are born knowledge and wisdom;
> from the lawful morsel come love and tenderness.
> When thou seest that from a morsel arise envy and guile,
> or ignorance and heedlessness,
> know that it is unlawful.
> Hast thou ever seen that thou sow wheat and will it produce
> barley?
> Hast thou seen a mare bring forth an ass's colt?
> The morsel is seed, and thoughts are its fruit;
> the morsel is the ocean, and thoughts are its pearls.
> From the lawful morsel in the mouth is born the inclination
> to serve (God) and the resolve to go to yonder world.
> From the lawful morsel O my beloved!
> light will find presence in your eye and your pure heart.[237]

Of course, quiddities have the potential to advance, ascend and become perfected. Human beings, through education and upbringing, can actualize those latent potentialities and allow those faculties to take their seat on the throne of manifestation until they become entirely realized. Indeed God will give strength to those contingent faculties and bestow His mercy and existence upon them. Whatever intent an individual has, God will strengthen and reinforce, allowing it to grow. For His function is to assist and succor. If a person pursues evil and disobedience, darkening his own heart, then God will assist him and all that darkness to fester. If you pursue goodness and obedience, and in the process illuminate your heart, then God will cultivate that light and strengthen it. Whatever a person

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[237] Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Mathnavi*, Book I (Mīr Khānī edition), p. 44

pursues, whatever he desires, God will provide. *Each We succour, these and those, from thy Lord's gift; and thy Lord's gift is not confined.*[238]

In other words, God emanates and bestows His munificence upon the engendered world and contingent quiddities. He showers the world with His infinite mercy. Each particular land benefits from that rain of Divine munificence according to its own inherent capacity. Each land retains from that mercy according to its own limitations, and transforms that mercy in accordance with its own nature. If that land, that vessel that accepts the grace, is pure and clean, it will keep that water clean; if that container is dirty and impure, it will also make the water impure. Rain is not guilty of polluting the vessel; but rather, intention and the rebellious soul are guilty, as Sa'dī wrote:

> The rain is pure and there is no dispute on its subtle nature
> Yet it causes tulip to grow in the garden and ugly brushwood
> in a marsh to thrive in the desert.

Rain is unified in its very nature. The faculty of free will that is present in human beings determines whether that Divine rain, those bounteous blessings, will fall upon pure land and allow beauty to grow, or whether they will fall upon impure land and allow ugliness to thrive. This is how obedience and sin present themselves in the human realm. Human beings are free and have volition until the final breaths of their lives. This volition will either allow them to reside in Heaven or cause them to be banished to Hell. If there were no volition, then there would be no goodness or evil; Heaven and Hell, and reward and punishment, would all be utterly meaningless. The Master of martyrs (Imām Ḥusayn) had this volition, as did Shimr. But on both sides, the force of their actions was from God. Yet because the intention and the will of each individual were different, that force and Divine Beneficence manifested differently. *God would never lead a people astray after that He*

[238] Qur'an, 17: 20

has guided them, until He makes clear to them as to what they should be godfearing; surely God knows everything.[239]

God only misguides after He has completed His proof and has made the path of truth and eternal happiness manifest. After that if a man chooses the path of misguidance through his own evil volition and intentions, then God will allow his desires to be realized and become reality. *Thereby He leads many astray, and thereby He guides many; and thereby He leads none astray save the ungodly.*[240]

It becomes abundantly clear that both guidance and misguidance are in God's hand. Yet He does not misguide anyone without reason. His misguidance is His allowing and cultivating that evil intention that is latent within that person, giving a real and true form to those evil forms already present within his heart. Thus, we can use these verses that are qualified (*muqayyad*) to explain those verses that are unqualified (*mutlaq*) such as the following: *[T]hen God leads astray whomsoever He will, and He guides whomsoever He will; and He is the All-mighty, the All-wise.*[241]

These verses qualify others in their stipulation that this Divine misguidance is fundamentally about sin and a reneging of that covenant. In these situations, any action that an individual commits, or any intention that he harbors and instills, God will cultivate and amplify manyfold. *...As the likeness of a grain of corn that sprouts seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains. So God multiplies unto whom He will; God is All-embracing, All-knowing.*[242]

And just as we can call these natural consequences and effects of our actions, and call them our sustenance and destiny, we can also call them our reckoning. These effects are both a

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[239] Qur'an, 9: 15

[240] Qur'an, 2: 26. See also 13: 27: *Say: "God leads astray whomsoever He will, and He guides to Him all who are penitent"*; 40: 34: *Even, so God leads astray the prodigal and the doubter*; and 61: 5: *When they swerved, God caused their hearts to swerve.*

[241] Qur'an, 14: 4

[242] Qur'an, 2: 261

sustaining and a reckoning, and are essentially identical. Insofar as the first act deserves and necessitates this second event, it is called a reckoning; and insofar as it helps sustain and continue the existence of a person, it is called sustaining. So we see how close sustenance and reckoning are; so much so that we can say that both are of a single reality, and are just two things from two different perspectives. It should also become abundantly clear what God's attribute of *swift in reckoning* means.

All affairs, including human actions, are connected to and cannot be separated from that reckoning. As soon as those actions are realized, their effects will arise without the slightest delay. Reckoning is thus coupled with and necessarily arises from our actions. God is the non-delimited master and ruler of all existence. None can oppose Him nor delay His command. His command has been given, that this succession of action and reckoning must occur, and it cannot be denied or delayed; and as an act of God, it is neither easy nor difficult for the Divine Self, as *God judges; none repels His judgment; He is swift at the reckoning*[243] and *His is the judgment; He is the swiftest of reckoners.*[244]

So if at any point, the Qur'an states that *We will reckon their actions*..., it is not to explain God's actual knowledge of those actions, but rather it is so as to allow those who will face this reckoning to understand why they will face their particular fate. We can make sense of this by understanding that God's knowledge towards all beings is presential. The entire chain of being, and its entire links, its causes and its effects, are present for God. *The earth altogether shall be His handful on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens shall be rolled up in His right hand.*[245]

The origin of the chain of being is connected to the Ultimate Cause, and for Him, no task is easy or difficult; there is nothing that is small or big. These are all terms that exist for

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[243] Qur'an, 13: 41
[244] Qur'an, 6: 62
[245] Qur'an, 39: 67

our limited minds and existences. Man is replete with ignorance; indeed, we can say that we are absolutely ignorant. All of these concepts and qualities of largeness and/or smallness, of intensity and lack thereof, of plentitude and meagerness, are essentially relative and constructed categories that pertain to delimited and qualified beings with contingent essences. They do not apply to God, whose Essence is identical to His Existence.

One of God's attributes is "the Quickest of Reckoners." On numerous occasions, the Qur'an states that God is *the quick of reckoning*. This is exactly like His quickness in dispensing sustenance. How does God sustain His creation? Sustenance is the munificent bestowal of life to each creature through which that creature continues its existence. Importantly, this sustenance is not exclusively material. Whatever is dispensed to a creature that perpetuates its life and sets the ground for its continued existence is a form of sustenance, whether it is material or spiritual, like the sun and the sky, or our breath, and like the intellect or our heart. It includes the bestowal of life, of the intellect, and of understanding of universal spiritual principles and concepts. It is any and all forms of Divine succor and blessings, whether intellectual and spiritual, or external and sensory. And this sustenance is bestowed by that Real and True God, without which we would not be. *All Praise, infinitely, perennially from the beginning of time until its very end, is to Him for all His blessings and bestowals.*

* * *

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Fifty-Seventh Discourse

On Variance in the Reckoning of Deeds

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *Then as for him who is given his book in his right hand, he shall surely receive an easy reckoning and he will return to his family joyfully.*[246]

Those who receive their scrolls of deeds from the right will be greeted with an easy reckoning, and will then greet and interact with their companions while filled with happiness and bliss. As for him who receives his scroll from behind his back, he will be remorseful. He will bemoan his terrible fate, for he will be cast into the fiery pits of Hell, burning therein. He was haughty and proud in this world when among his people and companions, and sincerely thought he would never have to return unto God, and answer for his sins. Indeed God is fully aware of all his actions and sees all his thoughts and intentions.

There are many such verses in the Qur'an that indicate a certain variation in the way people's actions will be reckoned on the Day of Judgment—a difference in degree of difficulty or ease. These verses tell us that some will face an easier and quicker reckoning, while others, a much more arduous one. *For when the Trump is sounded, that day will be a harsh day, for the unbelievers not easy.*[247]

We read in chapter 69 that when the Companions of the Right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*) receive their record, they will say with a certain exuberance, "Come and read my scroll. I had faith and truly believed that such a day would come... *So he shall be in*

[246] Qur'an, 84: 7–8

[247] Qur'an, 74: 9–11. See also 25: 26: *The Kingdom that day, the true Kingdom, shall belong to the All-merciful and it shall be a day harsh for the unbelievers*; and 78: 40: *[A]nd the unbeliever shall say, "O would that I were dust!"*

a pleasing life."[248] But when the Companions of the Left receive their deeds, they will say, "Would that I had never received my scroll and faced my deeds. Would that my wealth and power availed me on this Day."

In his *Kitāb al-Amālī*, Shaykh Ṣadūq narrates a *ḥadīth* from Imām Ṣādiq, stating that on the Day of Judgment, two residents of Heaven—one poor, while the other rich—will be brought for questioning and will receive their reckoning. The poor individual will receive Allāh's compassion and mercy soon after his reckoning has begun, whereas the rich individual will be exhaustively questioned and his deeds meticulously reviewed, resulting in a drawn-out reckoning.

The following is another *ḥadīth* reported from Imām Muhammad Bāqir:

> The Prophet of God once said, "Every person who receives a very exacting reckoning, that is his punishment."
>
> Then someone asked him, "O Prophet of God! Then why does Allah state, *[H]e shall surely receive an easy reckoning*?"
>
> The Prophet replied, "That will be an *'arḍ*, meaning a careful examination."[249]

Majlisī explains this *ḥadīth* through another one narrated from the Prophet. According to him easy reckoning is when angels present one's Book of Deeds without any question or dispute (*munāqashah*). The act of *munāqashah* refers to a very meticulous and exhaustive reckoning, a "splitting of hairs" in the accounting of deeds. According to certain traditions, the following verse indicates that even some dutiful believers fear a very exacting reckoning: *[W]ho join what God has commanded shall be joined, and fear their Lord, and dread the evil reckoning...*

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[248] Qur'an, 101: 6

[249] *Ma'āni al-Akhbār* (Ḥaydari edition), p. 262

'Ayyāshī mentions five other traditions that convey a similar meaning as this verse. Here, we will suffice with mentioning only one of them. Imām Ṣādiq explains God's words in the following verse: *And dread the evil reckoning*... He said, "It is a very exacting investigation and scrutiny." And he said, "Their sins will count against them while their good works will not count for them."

In his *Risālah-i Ma'ād* ("Treatise on the Day of Judgment") our great teacher, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, states that there is general agreement among both Sunni and Shī'ī commentators that the "evil reckoning" in this blessed verse refers to that *istiqṣā*. There is also consensus in the authenticity of this *ḥadīth*. Therefore, it should be clear from this explanation that no injustice will be done in the reckoning of that Day. And everyone will be judged on the basis of their own actions, and not anyone else's, as *No soul laden bears the load of another*.[250] In other words, no soul will be burdened by another, nor will any soul be prosecuted without reason. Of course, this does not preclude a meticulous reckoning. A soul's actions may indeed be judged meticulously, only on the basis of his merits and the fullest extent of what justice dictates. This dreadful reckoning will be directed primarily towards the transgressors and criminals, those who commit injustice against the poor, weak, and abased. It is also possible that these individuals will receive God's mercy; that He will turn a blind eye towards their wrongdoings, and not deal with them in this exacting way. Rather, they may face a short and quick judgment. This is particularly for those believers who had committed errors and mistakes out of ignorance, and who did not commit sins out of pride or vanity and self-centeredness. God's forgiveness is therefore not a universal law that necessarily applies to all His creatures. It is a particular decree that depends entirely upon the Will of God: *He forgives whomever He wills*. Of course, His forgiveness is based on His eternal wisdom, and only applies to those who truly deserve that Divine grace. God will also withhold His mercy and withdraw His pardon from whomever He wills, also

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[250] Qur'an, 6: 164

on the basis of that Greater Good as determined by that Divine wisdom. This applies particularly to those who maliciously transgress against Him and have instilled an enmity against God, through their pride and egocentricity. It applies to those who dare to oppose God, and those who believe that they deserve that status of pride and individuality. Justice, on the other hand, is a universal principle, and God will implement it in all cases. Of course, even this principle is not applied uniformly, and does not necessarily prevent Him from treating His creatures with compassion when accounting for his creatures' deeds. We can therefore conclude that the first principle is the implementation of Divine justice and is applied universally, but not uniformly; the second is Divine compassion, which is dispensed specifically, based on the Divine Will. Thus, the system of Divine judgment has an underlying principle, and that is: it would be unjust for God to disregard and forgo any good deed an individual has done. But it would not be unjust for Him to forgo a punishment He has threatened that individual with, and to forgive him out of His Divine mercy. Rather, this forgoing of a threat would in reality correspond to His forgiveness and mercy, and would entirely depend upon His Will, as God indeed never contradicts His own promise and *[V]erily God will not fail the tryst.*[251] And among the promises that God has made is the following: *God has promised those of you who believe and do righteous deeds that He will surely make you successors in the land...*[252]

If it were reasonable for God to go against His promise of reward, then we could not guarantee that He will honor any of His promises to those who do good deeds. It would undercut any and all trust in Divine oaths; even the promise of Eternal Bliss for those who do good deeds would be unreliable. Honoring one's oaths is a virtue, and God is the perfection of all virtues. He also must honor His promise to reward the good. It is evil and ugly for someone to renege on an oath, and far be it from God to commit any evil or ugliness. In fact, it is the Devil

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[251] Qur'an, 3: 9

[252] Qur'an, 24: 55

who abandons his oaths, and will, on the Day of Judgment, inform his followers that *God surely promised you a true promise; and I promised you, then I failed you...*[253] In short, an "evil" reckoning does not mean that God will not account for all the good a person has done. After all, God has promised to reward good deeds, and He will never go against His promise, for that would be an act of injustice, as He is not unjust, and *Surely God shall not wrong so much as the weight of an ant...*[254] Rather, an "evil" reckoning refers to a particularly meticulous and detailed evaluation of an individual's actions. There are many traditions mentioned in Ayyashī's commentary, one of which was previously mentioned—that the good acts of a person will not be considered, but his evil acts will be. These traditions in reality refer to this meticulousness and precision. Indeed, if examined with this precision, all of the good that is attributed to the evil and corrupt would actually dissolve and vanish. This is because for an act to be truly good, the actor must intend it as a means of gaining proximity to God. He cannot commit that act for any being other than God. Nor can it be committed with affectation or pride, for worldly desires or evil intent. If all acts are evaluated on the basis of this criterion and at this level, few truly *good* acts would remain. And once this precision is applied, God removes those acts from consideration. Of course, the evil acts will remain as such and will be used against the disbelievers.

As for the Divine threat and promise (*waī'd*), God does not need to carry out the punishment for all who breach His command and commit sin. The threat is meant primarily as a deterrent, as a disincentive to committing evil deeds, and to specify a particular recompense for those acts. A threat alone never restricts the ruling of a judge, nor does it stop him from pardoning the culprit and forgiving his sins, just as he is not obligated to pardon the criminal so he can freely return to the evil he did before. A judge who stands to uphold the truth can either show mercy and forgive, or implement the law fully and sentence the

[253] Qur'an, 14: 26
[254] Qur'an, 4: 40

culprit to a punishment appropriate to the crime. This possibility of punishment is in fact sufficient for deterring many from committing those crimes, in a way that having a mandatory punishment is not. Mandatory punishments do not apply to Divine judgments, and can even lead to despair, itself the worst sin against of God. This principle of applying punishments varyingly and accounting for an individual's particular situation is widely accepted and rational. If a judge decides that an individual deserves to be pardoned, his pardoning the culprit will reflect his nobility and wisdom.

The reckoning itself can either take a very long time for some people, or end quickly for some others. Only the criminals will suffer the fate of an extended reckoning of their actions. The question is: why? The Qur'an tells us that the ascent of angels and the spirit (*rūḥ*) from the celestial to the terrestrial takes very long, said to be approximately 50,000 years, to complete: *To Him the angels and the Spirit mount up, in a day whereof the measure is fifty thousand years.*[255] This is in fact equal to 50 years in the Divine realm. However, the question is, why is time measured differently in these different realms? To answer this question, we must first try to better understand the nature of time. Philosophers and scientists have given many different explanations for time.

In the Book of "Physics" in his monumental work *Shifā'*, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), the Master of Philosophers, enumerates some of the different philosophical positions on the nature of time. According to him, some claim that time is simply a postulate used to explain movement in nature. Others claim the impossibility of understanding the true nature of time. And yet others have claimed that time has an independent reality, a position that has various possibilities. Some say that the created world begins with time. Some philosophers believe that time has a physical substance. Plato held that time is an independent substance, independent of any body. Aristotle, on the other hand, understood time as a measure of motion. As a result,

[255] Qur'an, 70: 4

many see time as a measure and a consequence of the yearly and daily motion of the celestial bodies.

After Ibn Sīnā, Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī understood time to be a measure of existence. In other words, the time of each temporal being is the measure of the existence of that being. In contrast, others view time in purely relational and relative terms, with time only existing when two things are compared or related to one another. When the two beings are switched, the time that measures the relation between those two things will also change.

Mullā Ṣadrā, the pride of sages and philosophers,[256] sees time as the measure of movement in the substance of existent beings, particularly as it relates to the physical realm. According to him, time is a single extended, continued, and connected matter between beings that are in horizontal and anterior-posterior relationship to each other. Since time is an extended and connected quantity in motion, inevitably its origin must also be an extended, continued, and connected quantity in motion. We perceive motion in terms of the following four categories: quantity, quality, location, and condition. None of these four accidental categories have an independent existence. They are all dependent on a substance. Therefore, a substance must have some motion within its very essence, and as a result the motion that occurs in these accidents is then a consequence of the motion that occurs in the substance itself. Therefore, Mullā Ṣadrā sees time as being extracted from the transubstantial motion of beings, with time being the measure of this transubstantial motion. We can summarize his view in the following words: that the substance of the physical realm is always in a state of motion, of change and renewal; time is the means by which motion is measured and calculated, and finally, motion in accidents is a consequence of motion in substances.

Having provided his proof, Mullā Ṣadrā, draws out the following implications of this concept of transubstantial motion,

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[256] The honorific title with which he is often cited in philosophical circles is *Ṣadr al-muti'allihīn*, i.e. foremost among those who have become God-like; a saintly philosopher and a sage who has attained God-like qualities.

all of which are secondary in relation to the motion of substance:

- The temporal Origination of the World (*ḥudūth al-'ālam*): this realm, by its very essence and being, is always in a constant state of motion, creation, and renewal, and the individuator of this motion is time.

- The soul is corporeal or material in its origination and spiritual in its subsistence (*al-nafs jismānīyah al-ḥudūth ruḥānīyat al-baqā'*). This means that the rational soul is at the first stage of corporeality and materiality, but as a result of its transubstantial motion, it is able to ascend various levels of perfection without any change in its quiddity, until it attains that ultimate level of detachment.

A Corporeal Resurrection: From his second conclusion, Mullā Ṣadrā draws a further implication that the corporeal, the soul, and the spiritual are hierarchical forms of a single reality. Through his theory of transubstantial motion, he was able to prove physical resurrection in a way that really went against the prevailing philosophical positions on this issue. This conclusion was in contrast to the view of the earlier philosophers, who were only able to prove the abstraction of the soul from the body, and concluded that resurrection will be spiritual and decidedly not corporeal.

- Defining Time and its Status. According to him, substance is, by its very essence, in motion; therefore, time is the measure of this transubstantial motion in the physical realm.

- Relating the Mutable to the Temporal: In order to show the connection between beings of the world and the Prime Cause—God—the ancients among the divine

> philosophers developed various theories, the most important of which was the theory of "Celestial Intellects" and the Tenfold Intellects. They argued that the Divine Light first descended unto the First Intellect, and from there, unto the remaining nine Intellects and celestial bodies, until it arrived upon the lowest tenth Intellect, which corresponds to the moon and from which the physical realm is derived. Through this theory they tried to prove how multiplicity can arise in the created world from a Being that is absolutely Singular in all respects.[257]

Mullā Ṣadrā realized that once he was able to prove his theory of transubstantial motion, he could do away with this theory and its underlying assumptions. According to his theory, all of creation fundamentally consists of two dimensions: the material and physical dimension, which is in constant motion and change, and the spiritual and celestial dimension, which is immutable and permanent. This second dimension is similar to the concept of the Platonic Forms and archetypal beings, through which all beings are related to the Divine Origin.

There is no movement or change in the celestial dimension. It is that level of existence that preserves the changes that occur on the physical realm. The relationship between these two dimensions is likened to the relationship between the soul and the body. From one perspective, constant change and movement is a reality, albeit a lower level of reality, sourced in that universal source of motion located in the material realm. From another perspective, there is stability and continuity, which is

[257] The ancients among the divine philosophers had various theories for how the Prime Cause, God, is related to all other beings, including the physical realm. The main problem arose from the following philosophical axiom: "A single being does not produce except another single being." The question is: how does multiplicity arise in the created world from a Being that is absolutely Singular in all respects, namely God? To answer this dilemma, the ancients presented a cosmology based on "Celestial Intellects," namely that there are 10 Intellects that correspond to particular celestial bodies.

simply the higher plane of existence that emerges from the Divine Origin, the source of the material realm. The weaker "changing" dimension comprises the world of multiplicity and matter, whereas the immutable and permanent dimension results in a singular realm of the soul and the spirit, of the celestial and the inner, and is directly connected to the Divine Reality.

This, in sum, is what this divine philosopher has explicated regarding motion and the soul, in the "Physics" of his *al-Asfār* [*arba'ah*], along with his other writings. According to this explanation, time is specific to the physical realm, a world of forms that experience change and motion; the higher spiritual realm does not experience motion and change. Time, as the measure of change and movement, becomes meaningless in that realm that experiences no change and movement. Where there is no movement, there is no time.

On the basis of this introduction, we can now say: the rational soul, after it has ascended the various stations in the physical realm through its transubstantial motion, reaches a certain level of detachment from the material body wherein gradation and renewal become irrelevant; rather, it encompasses both the body and motion, of time and knowledge of all things terrestrial. In such a station, millions of years will pass, and yet the soul feels no change, but sees. It sees itself as immutable and permanent, immutable in a realm of permanence. This is in contrast to ordinary regular people who see themselves entirely in terms of the terrestrial realm; as the world moves and changes in its existential and transubstantial journey, so do they. These people fully sense and experience time and its passing.

One important point here is the relativity of detachment. It is, along with the motion that it proceeds from, gradual and individual. It is entirely possible for one to reach the station of formal and intermedial perfection, but not attain the station of detachment of the soul. In such a case, although a person may attain perfection, he will not achieve absolute detachment. He will experience time passing by very quickly and at a much faster pace. Even some who pass the archetypal (*'ālam-i*

mithāl) and are passing into the abode of the soul will experience this quickened sense of time.

There are many examples of this relativity of time, even in this world. First, consider when a person sleeps and does not at all sense the passing of time; when a person is unconscious or faints; newborns who have not yet grown accustomed to this realm of multiplicity; or when a person who is elated and happy experiences time as passing very quickly; or people such as the prophets who while receiving revelation do not experience time; when someone focuses very intensely he does not sense time passing; or a scholar who is totally preoccupied with a scholarly pursuit, or a saintly man who directs his attention to God; voluntary death; hypnotic sleep; the quick traverse through time, wherein a person will experience a long period of time in just a few moments; and many other examples.

In contrast, when man is immersed in the world of multiplicity he also senses time more fully. For example, consider someone who has ever waited for something eagerly, or say, has been indicted and has to wait his day in court, or someone waiting for his punishment; or when a person awaits his beloved. For each of these individuals, each second becomes as long as an hour, or even longer. At times, it becomes so long that it seems each moment takes an entire lifetime to pass.

There are numerous examples of this universal reality in the Qur'an. One instance is the story of Prophet Jeremiah, who is resurrected after a hundred years. God asks him how long he rested. He says it was a day or maybe even part of a day.[258] The other is the story of the Seven Sleepers (*Aṣḥāb al-kahf*), who awoke after a 300-year-long slumber. They say to each other: maybe we slept for a day or part thereof.[259] In seven different places in the Qur'an, it is mentioned that those who are in the intermediate realm (*barzakh*) do not sense the passage of time, because they have reached a level of detachment particular to that realm.[260] There are also various traditions that describe the

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[258] Qur'an, 2: 359

[259] Qur'an, 18: 19

[260] Qur'an, 18: 6

length of *barzakh* on the basis of the varying experiences of those who inhabit that realm. We have already mentioned those varying lengths in the discourse on the intermediate world.

As for the Day of Judgment, and the tarrying of human beings therein, waiting for their questioning and their reckoning, there are numerous traditions that indicate it is not a uniform experience for all people. For the believers and the righteous, it will pass very quickly; for the disbelievers and libertines, it will proceed very slowly. For the prophets and the saints, it will be quick; for the evil-fated, slow. Of course, this does not mean that time is imagined or simply a mental construct; rather the very reality of time will be relative in this way. As we mentioned extensively in the section on the physical resurrection, the sections on questioning, on the recording and weighing of deeds, and on the Bridge, these are all stages after annihilation and in the realm of subsistence [in God] (*baqā'*), where all things are located and preserved in their appropriate place. Time, space, body, felicity or suffering, sorrow, bliss and pleasure, and Heaven and Hell will be there. Therefore this difference in experiencing time is rooted in a more substantial difference. After all, all beings *qua* being, including humans *qua* humans, are moving towards God, and all are seeking Him.[261] Therefore, there is a difference between the journey of the good and the evil, of the believers and the disbelievers. In the famous Ascension story, this is said of those who are "perplexed": "And I will engross/encompass his intellect with my knowledge; then I will raise him to the status of his intellect..."[262]

There is a real difference between the journey of those who truly love God and that of those who are preoccupied with contingencies and with their own mental concepts, in other words, with the illusory. This is the mirage-like state of those who exist in a world of vanity and conceit.[263] These people will experience time very slowly, as they are interrogated about all their

[261] Qur'an, 84: 6
[262] Mirzā Javad Āqā Maliki, *Asrār al-Ṣalāt* (Ḥurūfī edition), p. 299
[263] see Qur'an, 41: 44.

deeds. Traditions tell us that this time will be so difficult for them and so taxing that they will sweat tremendously, enough to quench the thirst of forty camels. And there is a wide spectrum of humans between these two groups, namely those who are brought nigh (*muqarrabīn*) and the deniers. There is a wide spectrum of people who will be judged in terms of their servitude and obedience towards God. As they increase their sincerity and devotion, they will come closer to that absolute detachment and experience time less. Conversely, as they increase in vanity and hubris, they will fall farther from that detachment and will experience time more slowly and deeply in their beings.

Mullā Ṣadrā's theory of the dual nature of human beings explains how this can be. According to his theory, the closer a man comes to the celestial dimension of his being, the clearer and more apparent the detachment of his rational soul becomes, and the more it is protected from illusory constructs. In contrast, the closer man gets to his terrestrial state, the less detached his soul becomes, and the more he is occupied with the illusory desires of this world. This will in turn lead to extending man's waiting period for reckoning on the Day of Judgment and to his reckoning passing by much slower.

Abū Sa'īd al-Khuḍrī states that when the following verse was revealed to the Prophet, a man asked him how long that Day will take: *To Him the angels and the Spirit mount up in a day whereof the measure is fifty thousand years.*[264] The Prophet responded, "I swear by the One Who has my life in His Hands, for the believer that Day will pass quickly. It will be for him the length of one canonical prayer that he did in this world, and maybe even quicker."

A narration recited on the authority of Imām Ṣādiq states, "If the reckoning on that Day were done by any other than God, each person would wait 50,000 years or more, and even then it would not be completed. However, with God's reckoning, it will be completed in less than a moment."

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[264] Qur'an, 70: 4

With these two narrations, it becomes clear that on the Day of Judgment, time will be experienced differently by various individuals according to their station on that Day. For some, it will extend beyond 50,000 years; for others, it will last but a moment. They will witness and experience time in accordance with their inner reality. This is what is meant by the relativity of time on the Day of Judgment. It is entirely different from what modern scientists, like Einstein, posit about its relativity.

The essence of time, according to Einstein, is based on the motion of physical bodies. He proposed the notion of a fourth dimension for the material realm on the basis of the notion that time and space are not really separate realities.

Isaac Newton conceived of time as independent of external events and the relations between these events. Time for him could be imagined as an independent and absolute line; each occurrence would then appear on a segment of this line.

Newton's theory of time was severely critiqued by many of his contemporaries, including Leibnitz, who rejected his notion of an absolute time and conceived of it as an abstracted relationship between events, an abstraction that presents the order between the various types and forms of occurrence.

Einstein also rejected the notion of an "absolute time." He arrived at his own theory of time by attempting to reconcile [James] Maxwell's theory of electro-magnetism and Newton's physical laws. Newton states in his *Principia* that the motion of all bodies in a single space is uniform, regardless of whether that space is in motion or not. Yet this was in conflict with Maxwell's theory, because it required all mechanical and electromagnetic laws, for example those describing light, to be equal for all observers who are moving at a uniform speed.

Einstein finally concluded that the measure of time is none other than the simultaneous occurrence of two or more events. Those events that time has a role in only mean that two events take place at the same time, which may or may not have any relevance to one another, like the arrival of a train in the station and a clock showing 6 o'clock. This proves nothing but the relativity of time. According to this theory, a single external event can be measured with great precision by means such as sound,

light, or even electromagnetic waves, but not for other events whose measures may be different. We can deduce several conclusions from this theory.

First, that the watch of a particular observer will necessarily be different, either slower or faster, than the watch in another space, a phenomenon called "time dilation," which, from Einstein's point of view depends on the position of the observer who is doing the measurement.

Second, it requires a reformulation of Newtonian physics, which defined how the physical world was understood for centuries. For example, the mass of a particular object was previously seen as being separate and independent from its speed; with the new theory of relativity, one must also account for the speed to calculate that mass. As a result, whenever a entified force acts upon that body, it has less of an effect than previously thought, because that body was already in motion. Hence, no body can travel at the speed of light. Hypothetically however, if a watch or a clock could travel at the speed of light, from a different reference frame, it would seem that time on that clock had slowed or even stopped.

Third, there is "length contraction," where the length of an object in the direction of motion contracts. For example, the length of a ruler at rest will be different from the length of that ruler if we were in motion relative to it. This contraction is also a result and intrinsic to the very act of measurement.

According to the special theory of relativity, the time of an event according to a particular observer in a particular reference frame is relative to that observer and cannot be generalized for other observers in other reference frames. Every observer attributes a special time for an event that occurs in another place and can measure that time in accordance with information he has about the location of such event and the speed with which he connects to that event. This is the basic distinction between Newtonian time—and his notion of "absolute time"—and Einstein's relativistic time.

After Einstein presented his special theory of relativity in 1905, [Hermann] Minkowski presented a precise mathematical model of that theory, replacing the disparate and independent

notions of "time" and "place" with the unified notion of "spacetime," henceforth presenting a fourth dimension for all external objects, a dimension that is not uniform for all observers. This means that the phenomena of space and time for each particular observer are the product of a particular phenomenon and event, which is then represented in terms of a four-dimensional manifold.

More precisely, Einstein presented two theories of relativity: one particular and one universal. Particular relativity applies to uniform motion, whether for straight or curved motion, and where the reference frames are not accelerating in relation to one another. Universal relativity deals with two reference frames that are accelerating at varying velocities. Particular relativity is based primarily on two postulates: first, "the laws of physics are invariant in all inertial systems" (non-accelerating frames of reference); second, "the speed of light in a vacuum (c) is the same for all observers, regardless of the motion of the light source." Universal relativity accounts for gravity and the general gravitational pull of objects, and the constancy of the speed of light. In fact, many of the postulates of the theories of relativity had been predicted by scientists to varying degrees before Einstein.

[Hendrik] Lorentz was one such scientist who had already arrived at some of the mathematical formulations for Einstein's theory of relativity, although with notable differences. [Jules Henri] Poincaré had also discovered the basic theory of relativity before Einstein, albeit not in the elegant and simplified theory of the latter.

Modern physics assumes that the foundation of relativity theory is in motion. If we assume that space or matter is at rest, then relativity becomes meaningless. Insofar as the only means by which we can discover objects in the universe are through sound, light, or electromagnetic waves, and insofar as all of these are also in motion, the precise reality of any of these objects can never be truly discoverable by any individual absolutely. Rather, they will only be discoverable to a particular observer relative to his position in time and space. For example, the rising of the sun, the moon, and the stars and the exact time

of their setting will all depend upon their speed and the time that their light takes to reach the observer. All of these affect the time it takes for the rising and setting to be measured by the observer.

To restate, all beings are constantly in motion; time has an effect on their position, because the distance of moving objects at uniform speeds is equal to their velocity times time; and time is the quotient of distance divided by speed. From this, it can be concluded that time, in terms of its role in determining the dimensions of a body, can be described as a fourth dimension, even though time—just like space—is relative, and will be different with relation to different observers in different reference frames.

From this discussion on time from philosophers' point of view or modern scientists' perspective, four different views of time may be drawn—two philosophical, and two physical. As for the two theories proposed by philosophers, the first is the famous peripatetic theory of time attributed to Aristotle. According to this theory, time is real and independent of the world. It originates in the rotation of the heavenly bodies and is the substratum for all physical events. But insofar as they believed that time is only an accident of these events, time for them was not relevant to the quiddity of temporal beings.

Second was Mullā Ṣadrā's theory of transubstantial motion, wherein all bodies and objects of the material world are seen as having a moving and changing substance, with time being a product of this change. On the basis of this theory, time and motion do not originate in that particular and essential part of beings. Rather they are located universally and generally in the larger physical realm, and can be considered a fourth dimension, which is an extension of the temporal essence of all beings.

As for the two scientific theories of time, the first was Newton's theory of space and time, where each is postulated as an independent dimension and is independent of bodies or objects that may occupy it. Although this theory, which is fundamentally empirical, does not attempt to explain the essence or nature of time itself, it more or less adopts the Aristotelian model

of time and attributes the accident of time to all beings. The second scientific and empirical model is that of Einstein's theory of relativity. It negates the notion of an absolute time, instead proposing the concept of relative simultaneity. According to this explanation, the time of each phenomenon appears in such a way that every phenomenon is dependent on its being simultaneous with all other phenomena.

From what has so far been mentioned, it becomes clear that the philosophical theories about time do not conflict with the scientific postulates of Einstein's or Minkowski's theories, even though each proposes its own definition of time. Philosophy attempts to discover the realities of substances and beings in the world, whereas science focuses on the material and physical aspects of those beings and their accidents. So these conflicts do not result in any contradictions, meaning neither can fully refute the other, because they are looking at a single reality from two entirely different perspectives. This is one of the starker differences between philosophy and the empirical sciences.

In philosophy, what is meant by the relativity of time is the degree of a being's detachment; in science, it refers to the variation in the measure of time based on factors relevant to that measure. Science does not deal with the reality of beings and the means by which they attain that incorporeality. On the Day of Judgment, it is wholly possible that this realm, along with all its accidents, including time, will have changed unrecognizably. Therefore, these scientific theories are entirely irrelevant to the Qur'an's reference to time and the varying experiences of it by those who will be present on the Day of Judgment. These disparate experiences are based on the varying states of the souls of those individuals, and not on the relative movement of the Earth or any other object. Time travels faster for a person who has reached a higher station of spiritual detachment, and slower for a person who is immersed in worldly and carnal desires. The Day of Judgment will see the emergence of all those dispositions and internal attributes that we represent in this world, and nothing more. For, after all, the Day of Judgment is the inner dimension of this realm.

The following is narrated from Imām Ṣādiq: "When 'Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn [Imām Sajjād] would rise for prayer, he would become as steady as the trunk of a tree. He would not move but would only sway with the wind. His color would change. When he prostrated, he would not lift his head until he began sweating profusely."

This is that state of detachment that the true saints and Friends of God experience. They immerse themselves in their Lord, become selfless, and forget all things other than God. The example of Imām 'Ali is a case in point. It is said that when an arrow needed to be removed from his leg, it would be done during his prayer, when he would lose all sense of pain—this, along with all the instances where he would fall unconscious when calling to God, where to everyone else it would seem that he indeed had died.

A tradition tells us that when a Friend of God enters the gathering place on the Day of Judgment (*maḥshar*) God will gather around him all the *hawrīs* who were awaiting patiently for his arrival, and who will be delighted by his presence. They will have reached their beloved, and will see his beautiful face, and feel his blessed presence. However the Friend of God will at that time be so captured and immersed in the Divine Presence that the *hawrīs* will think that he has fallen asleep, and will ask God to direct his attention towards them. Then, God will command His Friend to descend to the *hawrīs* and be with them. At this point, the saint will descend to the *hawrīs*, having spent 80 years in direct contact with his Lord, and will be with them until he turns to his Lord and says, "How quickly you have banished me from your inner sanctuary." With these words, he will once again ascend to the sacred sanctuary of his Lord, and be fully immersed in the Divine Presence.

* * *

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Fifty-Eighth Discourse

On the Universality of the Reckoning on the Day of Judgment

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *Now by thy Lord, We shall surely question them all together; concerning that they were doing.*[265]

The realm of questioning follows the world of reckoning, and it is its corollary. "To question" means that the questioner seeks to clarify the truth behind what another person holds. On the Day of Judgment, souls will be questioned with regard to their deeds, and interrogated about the good and the evil they have wrought. They will witness the corollaries and spiritual effects of their actions, seeing all the fruits their deeds bore. The Day of Judgment is the day of fruition, of revelation and manifestation. It is a day when covenants are fulfilled, and people are presented with their responsibilities and the oaths they made in this world. It is a day when a person's innermost secrets and intentions are revealed; *...the day when the secrets are tried,*[266] and all those veils that they used to hide them are rent. The term *sarā'ir* is the plural of *sarīrah*, which refers to a part of the rational soul where its innermost thoughts, intentions, and secrets are stored. Hence they call a deeply held secret a *sarīrah.*

In addition, there are also many traditions that discuss this issue, referring to its various aspects and dimensions. These traditions can be divided into several categories as follows.

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265 Qur'an, 15: 91–92

266 Qur'an, 86: 9

يَوْمَ تُبْلَى السَّرَائِرُ

Many other Qur'anic verses deal with this interrogation. For example see 28: 6: *No; that which they were concealing before has now appeared to them...*; and 16: 93: *[A]nd you will surely be questioned about the things you wrought.*

First are traditions that indicate that all individuals will have to face a reckoning, and all will be questioned on the basis of their deeds. The following is one such example as found in the book *'Iddat al-Dā 'ī*:

> God, Exalted is He, will gather all creatures on the Day of Judgment. Some will have rights and claims against others, and He will hold some of the corollaries (of those claims) against them. He will say, "O my servants. Whatever claims I had against you, I have forgiven them. So let some of you forgive the consequences of others, and let all of you together—with and by My mercy—enter Paradise."[267]

There are also Qur'anic verses that convey the same message, that all people will be questioned. For example, *So We shall question those unto whom a Message was sent, and We shall question the Envoys, and We shall relate to them with knowledge; assuredly We were not absent.*[268]

But other verses give a different view of the reckoning, namely that some of those truly criminal individuals will not be questioned about their acts. For example: *And yet the sinners shall not be questioned concerning their sins.*[269] How can we reconcile the seeming conflict between these two sets of verses? Shaykh Ṭabarsī presents three solutions to this problem.

First, he states that this questioning is not meant to discover something that is hidden or unknown. Rather, it is meant to force one to confess to one's sins and to censure them. Hence, this phrase follows the aforementioned verse 39 in chapter 55: *The sinners shall be known by their mark...*

A second possible resolution lies in the existence of varying stages on the Day of Judgment. When all of creation is gathered on the Plains of the Final Day, they will all be questioned (*And halt them, to be questioned...*). But once the final

[267] *'Iddat al-Dā 'ī*, p. 82

[268] Qur'an, 7: 6–7. See also 15: 92–93 and 37: 24.

[269] Qur'an, 28: 78. See also 55: 39: *[O]n that day none shall be questioned about his sin, neither man nor jinn.*

judgment is carried out and the sinners are sent to Hell, the questioning will end.

The third possibility is that there will only be questioning in some of those stages, and not in others. 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī also addressed this issue in his exegesis on verse 78 in chapter 28 (*And yet the sinners shall not be questioned concerning their sins*).

This verse follows a description of Korah and his punishment. The context apparently refers to the Divine wont of punishing the sinful and allowing them to destroy themselves by means of their own sins. At the time of their punishment, they will not have a chance to justify their deeds. Because God knows the reality behind their acts, from the very beginning they will receive a punishment that is unavoidable.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī also states that there is no conflict between the verses that describe humans and *jinn* in chapter 55 and the verses in chapter 37 (*And halt them, to be questioned...*) and the following verse in chapter 15 (verse 92): *Now by thy Lord, We shall surely question them all together concerning that they were doing.*

There are indeed many stages to the Day of Judgment. In some stages questioning will occur, whereas in other stages, the mouths of the sinful will be sealed shut, and their arms and legs will be made to speak, as they bear witness to those sinful actions. In yet other stages, it will be their very faces and appearances that will speak on their behalf.

The universality of this questioning applies to all creatures, even the prophets and Imāms. The purpose behind the questioning of the prophets' nations and communities is to see how dutifully these people followed the commands of their prophets. On the other hand, the reason why the prophets will be questioned is to see how dutifully they proclaimed their message, and how their communities followed them. There is a tradition narrated on the authority of Imām Bāqir, according to which the Prophet said, "O you group of Qur'an-reciters. Fear God—Glorious and Majestic is He—with that which He has burdened you through His book. For I will be questioned, and you will also be questioned. I will be questioned about my

proclamation. As for you, you will be asked about what you were burdened with through my Lord's book and my wont."[270]

The Trial of Prophet Noah on the Day

According to a narration attributed to Imām Ṣādiq, he stated,

> When the Day of Judgment arrives, God—Glorious and Majestic is He—gathers all His creatures round, and the first person to be called to trial will be Prophet Noah.
>
> He will be asked, "Did you proclaim your message?"
>
> He will say, "Yes."
>
> He will then be asked, "Who will corroborate your claim?"
>
> He will respond, "Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah, blessings upon him..."
>
> And then the Prophet will call Ja'far and Ḥamzah to go and testify on his behalf. [271]

Thus the prophets will also be questioned and placed on trial, albeit a trial that accords to their status and function. The reckoning that they face is very precise and exacting, and much more dangerous, for the higher their status, the greater their responsibility. Other than God, all beings are contingent; and insofar as the prophets are also human, and only attain their lofty ranks through self-discipline and fulfilling their moral and legal responsibility, wherever they have a responsibility, they will also be questioned and tried regarding that responsibility. Their infallibility does not preclude their being questioned or tried. Infallibility, after all, does not strip away their volition. So long as they have volition, they will have moral and legal culpability, along with a reckoning and a trial.

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[270] As quoted in *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, vol. II, p. 606
[271] Ibid., 267

Questioning Jesus Christ on the Day of Judgment

The Qur'an states the following about the questioning of Prophet Jesus: *And when God said, "O Jesus son of Mary, didst thou say unto men, 'Take me and my mother as gods, apart from God'?" he said, "To Thee be glory! It is not mine to say what I have no right to. If I indeed said it, Thou knowest it, knowing what is within my soul, and I know not what is within Thy soul; Thou knowest the things unseen. I only said to them what Thou didst command me: 'Serve God, my Lord and your Lord.' And I was a witness over them, while I remained among them; but when Thou didst take me to Thyself, Thou wast Thyself the watcher over them; Thou Thyself art witness of everything. If Thou chastisest them, they are Thy servants; if Thou forgivest them, Thou art the All-mighty, the All-wise." God said, "This is the day the truthful shall be profited by their truthfulness. For them await gardens underneath which rivers flow, therein dwelling forever and ever; God being well-pleased with them and they well-pleased with Him; that is the mighty triumph."*[272]

In the *Tafsīr* of 'Ali ibn Ibrāhīm, the author enumerates a number of traditions in relation to the phrase in the verse mentioned above, *This is the day the truthful shall be profited by their truthfulness*, that speak of the way in which the Prophet and Imāms will be questioned, regarding their proclaiming of God's command, and their appointment of successors and their proximity to their Lord. It speaks of how each of the Imāms will be questioned, even on a Day when the closest creature to God will be the Prophet.

Majlisī also presents a narration attributed to Imām Ṣādiq where he explicitly states that the Prophet, the Imāms, and all the Muslims who lived during the time of each Imām will be questioned. It tells us how God will bring the Imāms as proofs of His message.[273]

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[272] Qur'an, 5: 116–19

[273] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. VII, pages 284-85

Second, the second set of traditions tell us that there is a particular group of faithful believers, those who were brought nigh (*muqarrabūn*), who will enter Paradise without ever being questioned or tried. There is as well a group of polytheists who in their denial of the truth have attained the utmost station of evil, and who will be banished to Hell without any questioning. We have already discussed these two realities in the discourse on the "Record of Deeds" and the weight of humankind's actions.

Those who were brought nigh (*muqarrabīn*) are the most select creatures of God, who have attained the station of total annihilation in the Divine, and whose acts are attributed to God Himself. They will not be tried or questioned. God says in the Qur'an: *But they cried him lies; so they will be among the arraigned, except for God's sincere servants...*[274]

The disbelievers, the polytheists, and the arrogant sinners are immersed in these terrible qualities; they deny and dispute, and act with malice and contempt. These people corrupted the Divine gift that existed within them. Thus, they will be completely abandoned by God on the Day of Judgment, and left without a protector or guide.[275]

The actions of such people will be voided. They will not be tried, nor will they be given a record of deeds, or face a reckoning. In a *ḥadīth* narrated on the authority of Imām Riḍā we read,

> The Prophet of God—the blessings of God upon him and his family, and upon them be peace—said: "God, Exalted and Mighty is He, will reckon and try all of His creatures, except the person who commits *shirk* against God, Exalted and Mighty is He. And this person will not be reckoned, and He will be banished to the Hell-fire.[276]

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[274] Qur'an, 37: 127–28

[275] Qur'an, 47: 11: *[A]nd that the unbelievers have no protector.*

[276] See *'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, p. 232. For a similar view see the narration attributed to Imām Sajjād, who said: "Know, O servants of God, scales will not be established for the people of *shirk*, nor will their registers of deeds be dispersed to them. The registers of deeds will only be dispersed to the

On the Meaning of Trial for Prophets

There is no true contradiction between stating that those brought nigh (*muqarrabīn*) and the select are not questioned, and that all creatures, including the prophets and Imāms, will be questioned. First, one must recognize that the *muqarrabīn* and the select are in a state of total annihilation (*fanā'*) in the Divine and therefore are excluded from being present on the Day of Judgment where the reckoning occurs. Yet those, like the prophets and the Imāms, have traversed beyond that station of annihilation and have entered the station of subsistence in God (*baqā'*), who have the responsibility of guiding and cultivating humanity existentially, legally, and morally. They have attained the station of all-comprehensiveness (*maqām al-jam'*) and have already experienced and benefited fully from all realms of existence, and therefore have fulfilled all the requirements of each realm and have perfectly been affected by the effects of all those realms. Therefore, they will go through questioning and reckoning. However, their questioning and reckoning will be fundamentally different from that of other servants of God.

In contrast, those who have not attained that station of annihilation in the Divine, their reckoning is one of retribution and condemnation for the evil they have done. At the very least, they are chastised. They will be interrogated for not having fulfilled their responsibilities, and for instilling a duality in their very beings. On the other hand, for the Friends of God and prophets, those who are brought nigh (*muqarrabīn*) and those who have been purified by God (*mukhlaṣīn*), the elect, and all those who have attained that station of subsistence after their total annihilation, their reckoning will be an exchange, a repose between a lover and his beloved, of unveiling and revealing the hidden mysteries of the Divine sanctuary. This station is clearly described in the traditions that speak on the questioning of the Prophet, all other prophets of God, and the Infallible Imāms.

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people of Islam." As quoted in Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. VII, pp. 258–59.

This conclusion can be drawn out if one pays just a bit of attention to some traditions of the Prophet. A fine example is the following *ḥadīth*: "Inwardly, I have such exalted states with God that no angel brought nigh and no messenger sent down can experience."[277]

In the terminology of the divinely inspired gnostics (*'urafā bi-Llāh*), of those travelers who have attained the station of certitude (*maqām-i yaqīn*), and of those who traverse the fourth of the journeys towards God, this is conveyed in symbolic terms such as the "Tales of Nightly Vigil," like the following example:

> He addressed me from my inner being, by discovering my secrets
> Then He said, "Do you know who I Am?" I said, "My ultimate dream."
> I then became annihilated in eternal subsistence in Him
> in His Essence, which is permanent and eternal.[278]

Thus, what makes the reality of the interrogation of the prophets is, in fact, an instance of the following *ḥadīth*: "We, [the community of prophets], have been commanded to speak to people in accordance with the level of their intellects."[279]

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[277] See *Mafātīḥ al-I'jāz*, p. 87. The texts of this and similar traditions are available also in Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Kernel of the Kernel: Concerning the Wayfaring and Spiritual Journey of the People of Intellect* (*Lub-I Lubab*), Mohammad H. Faghfoory (trans.) (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

[278] Shaykh Ibrāhīm Dassouqī, as quoted in Sha'rānī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Akhyār*, p. 182

[279] This *ḥadīth* is recorded in Marfu' Barqī, *Kitāb al-Mahāsin* on the authority of companions of Imām Ṣādiq and is available in *Uṣūl Kāfī*, vol. I, p. 23. See also *Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl*, p. 36, as quoted in Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. XVII, p. 41.

Instances of the Voiding of the Good Deed (*Ḥabṭ*) and the Covering of Bad Action (*Takfīr*)

One final issue that remains to be dealt with here is the issue of *ḥabṭ* and *takfīr*. The question is in what ways these will occur in relation to our deeds. *Ḥabṭ* is when an evil act cancels a good one, and expunges it and its effects. *Takfīr* is when a good act excises a bad deed. The fundamental question is whether or not actions affect one another, where a stronger deed may void the other, or be voided if it is weaker. If a good and an evil deed are equal, would they cancel each other out? Or is it that good and evil deeds are entirely separate entities that do not affect one another? On the Day of Judgment, will each act, as an independent entity, appear before the actor, along with all its accoutrements?

Some say each one of an individual's actions will remain as it is, preserved and unchanged. No act can affect another, nor can it be affected by another. Others have argued the opposite, in support of *ḥabṭ* and *takfīr*. They argue that ultimately, once the balance of a person's actions is calculated and the equivalent good and evil cancel each other out, the remainder will determine whether that person will be banished to Hell or will reside in Heaven. The correct position in our opinion is that generally *ḥabṭ* and *takfīr* only apply to certain situations and do not occur all the time and in relation to all cases.

The Fundamental Principle: *Ḥabṭ* and *Takfīr* Are Not Immutable Principles

First of all, a person and the actions he has committed, all of which have left an imprint on his soul, necessitate the continued preservation of those acts. An act is not voided or expunged without reason or cause; there really is no reason for us to think an evil act cancels a good one, or even veils it. And the Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet both attest to this point:

[A]nd whoso has done an atom's weight of good shall see it, and whoso has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it.[280]

There are other verses that explicitly negate *ḥabṭ* and *takfīr*, along with traditions that were previously mentioned in the discourse on the scroll of deeds. All of these indicate that these events of *ḥabṭ* and *takfīr* will generally not occur.[281] However, there are some specific instances wherein the notion of *ḥabṭ* is explicitly applied, and where a good deed will be negated by an evil one. This serves to specify that general rule of immutability.

The specific situation when *ḥabṭ* or *takfīr* apply according to the Qur'an include polytheism (*shirk*), disbelief (*kufr*), apostasy (*irtidād*), denying the truth of Qur'anic verses and the meeting of God on the Day of Judgment, and insulting or disrespecting the Prophet, the Imāms, and the principle and rank of *wilāyah*. These were all discussed in the 43rd discourse. Generally the traditions state that some evil actions do cancel out good ones, for example, if a person is disowned by his parents, or in cases of jealousy, or if he willfully disregards a Islamic jurist; and lastly, if he is unjust towards an oppressed person. Obviously these acts will not cancel out all of a person's good deeds, say to cause him to become a disbeliever or an apostate. Rather it will lead to a general expunging of his acts. Since we know that acts have different degrees of evil, we must also admit that there are different levels of *ḥabṭ*.

Many other verses also speak of *takfīr* in similar ways, stating, for example, that penitence causes the forgiveness of sins, and functions like penance for wrongs. Both forgiveness and *takfīr* refer to a certain "covering over" or veiling of an act. Therefore, penitence acts like a veil and covers the evil we have done.

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[280] Qur'an, 99: 7–8

[281] See for instance, 21: 47: *[E]ven if it be the weight of one grain of mustard-seed We shall produce it, and sufficient are We for reckoners.*

Variegated Changes to Human Actions by Divine Will

The Qur'an refers to the hiding of evil deeds in various ways, whether it be through their erasure, their transformation into good deeds, or even the proliferation of good deeds. There are explicit references to the different means by which an evil deed is veiled in the spiritual realm. One specifically refers to repentance: *Believers, turn to God in sincere repentance; it may be that your Lord will acquit you of your evil deeds...*[282]

Another verse refers to a person's refraining from committing cardinal sins. If a person does refrain from these major sins, God will forgive the minor sins he has committed, even if he does not actively repent for the latter. In other words, the very act of refraining from cardinal sins is on its own a penance for those minor sins. For example, *If you avoid the heinous sins that are forbidden you, We will acquit you of your evil deeds.*[283]

The other instance is that having faith in God and doing good deeds will by themselves lead to the forgiving of evil deeds. *And whosoever believes in God, and does righteousness, God will acquit him of his evil deeds...* Still another instance is to be pious and godfearing as the verse indicates: *And whosoever fears God, He will acquit him of his evil deeds, and He will give him a mighty wage.*[284] In general, whatever good deed a person does for God's sake will lead to God's forgiving his sins. *God forgives not that aught should be with Him associated; less than that He forgives to whomsoever He will.*[285]

Second, it is clear that good deeds will destroy evil acts. In other words, God Himself will erase evil. *[S]urely the good deeds will drive away the evil deeds.*[286] There are many other verses in this same vein, which speak of *habt*, and that God will

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[282] Qur'an, 66: 8
[283] Qur'an, 4: 31
[284] Qur'an, 65: 5
[285] Qur'an, 4: 48, 116
[286] Qur'an, 11: 114

erase an evil person's good deeds.[287] This is also referred to as "misguidance" or "being led astray" (*ḍilāl*).[288]

Third, good deeds result in transforming past evil acts into good deeds: *[S]ave him who repents, and believes, and does righteous work—those, God will change their evil deeds into good deeds, for God is ever All-forgiving, All-compassionate.*[289]

Fourth: God will amplify a person's meager good deeds: *These shall be given their wage twice over for that they patiently endured, and avert evil with good, and expend of that We have provided them.*[290]

Fifth: God will realize non-existent good on behalf of the individual. *And those who believed, and their seed followed them in belief, We shall join their seed with them, and We shall not defraud them of aught of their work; every man shall be pledged for what he earned.*[291] This verse indicates that if the offspring of righteous or evil ancestors abide by the wont and traditions of their ancestors, they will gain the same recompense as their ancestors, without anything being reduced from the recompense of their ancestors. This is due to their obedience and attachment to those ancestors. All of the good—or evil—of their ancestors will also be associated with them.

The Meaning of *Na'īm*

What does the term *na'īm* (true bliss) mean in the verse that has been the subject of interpretation by many commentators on the Qur'an, *Again, you shall surely see it with the eye of certainty then you shall be questioned that day concerning true bliss?*[292]

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[287] See 25: 25; 47: 10; and 47: 9.

[288] *But as for the unbelievers, ill chance shall befall them! He will send their works astray*, 47: 9.

[289] Qur'an, 25: 70

[290] Qur'an, 28: 54. See also 6: 161: *Whoso brings a good deed shall have ten the like of it...*

[291] Qur'an, 52: 21

[292] Qur'an, 102: 8

A third group of traditions states that human beings will be questioned about the *na'īm* (true bliss) they receive. According to Shaykh Ṭabarsī some exegetes believe the *na'īm* refers in a universal manner to Divine blessings. Others believe it to be the worldly good bestowed on the Meccans, in terms of food, water, and other goods. Still others think it is safety and health, an interpretation confirmed by narrations attributed to Imāms Bāqir and Ṣādiq. There is a long narration from Imām Ṣādiq where Abū Ḥanīfah asked him the meaning of this verse. The Imām stated that the *na'īm* refers to the Ahl al-Bayt and the Prophet, through whom the blessings and grace of God, His Divine Love and Affection, and Islam's leadership have been bestowed on the community. A tradition narrated from the Prophet states: "Every blessing will be asked about on the Day of Judgment, except that which is spent in the path of God, the Exalted.[293]

Another tradition narrated on the authority of Imām Ṣādiq tells us, "He said, 'There are three things that a faithful servant will not be accounted for: food that he eats; clothes that he wears, and a righteous wife who aids him and protect his chastity and piety.'"[294]

A third narration, from the Prophet, states: "There are three things that a servant will not be asked about: the rag that he uses to cover his privates, a broken piece of bread that he uses

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[293] *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin,* vol. II, p. 399

[294] For more on similar traditions on *na'īm* see Abū Burdah, who narrates the following *ḥadīth*: "The Messenger of God said, 'The steps of a servant will not pass away until he is asked of our, the Ahl al-Bayt's, love.' It was said, 'O Messenger of God, what is a sign of your love?'" The narrator then said, "Then he hit the shoulder of 'Ali, peace be upon him." Another *ḥadīth* is reported in *Majma' al-Bayan* from the Prophet, where he, along with a number of the companions, is invited to a person's house. Their host presents them with cool water and dates. After the Prophet leaves the house, he states, "These are the blessings you will be questioned about." Imām Riḍā also narrated a *ḥadīth* through Imām Ṣādiq that conveys a similar idea that *na'īm* is the Ahl al-Bayt. It was said, "O Messenger of God, what is a sign of your love?" The narrator then said, "Then he hit the shoulder of 'Ali, peace be upon him." Many more similar traditions and narrations are mentioned in vol. VIII, pp. 353–62.

to stop his hunger, and the house that shelters him from the elements" (lit. the heat and the cold).[295]

Now we must try to see how we can reconcile these various traditions and narrations and find out the true meaning of *na'īm.*

In his treatise on the Day of Judgment (*Risālah Ma'ād*) our exalted teacher, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, briefly dealt with this issue. A detailed analysis of this issue is available in *Bayān al-Sa'ādah*, where the author attempts to reconcile these traditions and presents the following explanation:

> It must be first be clear that this *ni'mah* is none other than the blessing of *wilāyah.* Whatever takes us closer to that *wilāyah*, whether it be the substance that is conducive to the animal faculties and the worldly blessings, or that takes away from those animal faculties. Whatever is cut off from that *wilāyah* is a punishment, even if it seems superficially to be a blessing. Whoever is connected to *wilāyah* is considered a guest of God, and can freely and licitly utilize all outward and inward blessings, of both the corporeal and the spiritual, as the Qur'an explains: *Eat of the good things wherewith We have provided you...*[296]

God will not question His servant about those blessings, because, after all, it would be detestable for a host to question his guest about the blessings he himself has offered his guest. But whoever is cut off from that *wilāyah* will actually be utilizing those blessings illicitly. It would be thus be entirely appropriate and just for the owner of those blessings to interrogate that person about how he used those blessings. This verse, *you shall be questioned that day concerning true bliss,*[297] refers to these individuals who are veiled away and cut off from that *wilāyah.* And this *na'īm* refers to *wilāyah*, and beyond that to all the substances that are conducive to the human and animal faculties. They will indeed be questioned about how grateful

[295] *Majma' al-Bayān* (Ṣaydā edition), pp. 535–36
[296] Qur'an, 20: 81
[297] Qur'an, 102: 8

they were. Did they use those blessings appropriately, in the right time and place? Or did they abuse them, in a wrong situation or for a wrong end?

The verse, then, points to the fact that when that veil of ignorance is removed, when it is lifted from man's eye, he will realize that *wilāyah* and all its corollaries were, in fact, the *na'īm*, and not these worldly and animalistic pleasures, which are actually a form of punishment and take man ever closer to the Hell-fire. At that time, they will be questioned and reprimanded. They will be asked, "Do you see now that the *na'īm* was not the worldly desires, which have resulted in your descending to Hell? Do you understand now that it was in reality *wilāyah* and its corollaries?" Or the verse could be referring to certainty.

Having attained the "eye of certainty" (*'ayn al-yaqīn*), man will now be asked about the "truth of certainty" (*ḥaqq al-yaqīn*). For after all, he has not yet explicitly experienced that truth, but has only intuited it, and that is at a lower level of existence. Therefore this interrogation, this questioning, will be appropriate. This explanation and resolution to the seemingly conflicting reports is confirmed by the following Prophetic *ḥadīth*: "The possessors for all blessings will be interrogated, except for those in battle or on *ḥajj*."

A spiritual wayfarer who has accepted *wilāyah* is wittingly or unwittingly always either engaged in a holy battle, or on the *ḥajj* pilgrimage. A *ḥadīth* from Imām Ṣādiq confirms this concept: "Whoever recites the name of God over his food will not be asked about the blessing of that food."

Only those who have accepted *wilāyah* can truly invoke the Name of God. Any other person who invokes His Name will fall under the category of "those who do not have a spiritual master (*shaykh*), the Devil has taken hold of their necks."[298] He has allowed Satan a place in his being, as Satan takes possession of all his states and actions. In such a state, even when a person invokes God's Name, Satan will use that phrase for his own devices, devoiding its words of meaning, and replacing

298. مَن لم يكن شيخ تمكّن الشيطان من عُنقه

God's Name with his own name. Thus for such a person, *In the name of God* becomes in reality "In the name of Satan."

From what has been discussed so far, we can conclude that for any blessing an individual benefits from, if used for the sake of God, that person will not be interrogated or questioned about that use. Rather God loves such use of His blessings and seeks it. But whatever blessing that individual avails himself of for a reason other than God, he will be questioned about, regardless of whether that blessing is his life or limb, his strength, knowledge, or any purely worldly blessings like his wife, children, food, or drink, or even his witnessing of awe-inspiring natural beauty, like a beautiful mountain or scenic pasturelands. He will be interrogated for such use because it would be against God's intention. Man was indeed created for *wilāyah.* It is, after all, the means by which one attains proximity to God, and through which one can attain the station of annihilation in the Divine Self. Fundamentally, it allows one to attain a station of absolute purity in worshiping God. As a result of this, *na'īm* should really be understood as referring to *wilāyah.* Whatever blessing man uses as a means of attaining that station of purity will be part and parcel of *wilāyah*, and therefore, of that *na'īm*. And whatever he does to oppose *wilāyah*, he will have done so in the path of Satan, who will take him farther away from the truth. He will have followed his basest self, and shall have, in reality, received a form of punishment.

These blessings, then, are in fact opportunities that allow man to reach a level of human nobility, attain that highest spiritual station, and find his proper place in the blessed abode of Divine sanctuary. This is the station of *wilāyah*; the love of Muhammad and his progeny is the sole ladder by which these lofty heights are attained, allowing us to reach the apex of spiritual growth. Whoever adheres to *wilāyah*, and struggles deeply in its path, will reside in that Garden of Bliss (*Jannat al-na'īm*). Whoever opposes it and rebels will reside in the abode of hardship and ruins (*dār al-naqmah*) and will be banished to pits filled with demons and devils. As God states, *Hast*

thou not seen those who exchanged the bounty of God with unthankfulness, and caused their people to dwell in the abode of ruin?—Gehenna, wherein they are roasted; an evil establishment![299]

Spending one's faculties, emotions, and intellect in the path of *wilāyah* and *tawḥīd* is the straight path, and is a blessing that man prays and asks God for in every prayer: *Guide us in the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast blessed; not the path of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray.*[300] This is the path of the righteous and the sincere, the martyrs and prophets. *[T]hey are with those whom God has blessed, Prophets, just men, martyrs, the righteous; good companions they!*[301]

As a concluding remark to our discussion, we must mention that these trials and this questioning and reckoning are not peculiar to human beings. Even animals have similar reckoning for their deeds. In the 40th discourse, we mentioned that animals will also be resurrected. Verse 38 of chapter 6 attests to this reality: *No creature is there crawling on the earth, no bird flying with its wings, but they are nations like unto yourselves. We have neglected nothing in the Book; then to their Lord they shall be mustered.*

According to Shaykh Ṭabarsī, in his exegesis on this verse, some animals will be resurrected just like humans, and they will make claims against other animals. He cites a *ḥadīth* on the authority of Abū Hurayrah and another from Abū Dharr Ghifārī, wherein he narrates the following:

> One day, I was with the Prophet when two goats began to attack one another. The Prophet said, "Do you know why these two are attacking each other?" The companions said, "No, we do not!"

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[299] Qur'an, 29: 28
[300] Qur'an, 1: 6–7
[301] Qur'an, 74: 6

> He responded, "God does, and He will soon judge between them." Then he recited the above-mentioned verse where it is said *they are nations like unto yourselves.*

In *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin*, Barqī cites a narration from the Commander of the Faithful, a part of which is the following:

> When God appears to his obedient worshipers, He will give them glad tidings, and will say, "I swear by My Glory and Majesty, the injustice of an oppressor will not pass Me by, even if it is a palm with a palm, or the wiping of a palm, or the smiting of a ram or a hornless ewe." He will retaliate for His servants, some of them for others, until no instance of injustice that an individual has perpetrated against another remain. Then God will send them to be reckoned.[302]

Obviously, since animals do not have intellects, they also are not accountable in the same way [as humans]. And yet, to the extent that they can distinguish between right and wrong, or between loyalty and treachery, they will be questioned about their deeds. Even in our own short lifetimes, we hear and see various animals, like dogs, cats, and wolves, who have this degree of discernment. There is a relation that explains animal instinct and is quite revealing.

It is said that one day Hārūn al-Rashīd ordered Imām Riḍā to be thrown into a pit of predatory animals. The narrator says

> There were around 40 vicious animals lurking in that pit. That night, Hārūn had a nightmare, and when he woke up, he asked me to see how 'Ali ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā was doing. I went to the pit, and saw that he was standing there and praying, while all the animals had circled around him. As soon as Hārūn heard this, he ordered the Imām to be removed from the pit, and be respected and ennobled.[303]

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[302] Marfu' Barqī, *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin*, vol. I, p. 7

[303] Sayyid ibn Ṭāwūs, *Ithbāt al-Hudah bi'l Nuṣūṣ wa'l Mu Jizāt*, vol. VI, p. 147

Indeed, it is not strange for these wild animals to comprehend the dignity and respect that is due the Imām. What is strange, however, is that humankind, who believes itself to be the noblest of God's creatures, can throw such a personage, Ḥusayn ibn 'Ali, the son of Lady Fāṭimah, into such a pit. God knows best.

* * *

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Fifty-Ninth Discourse

Resurrection of All Beings of the Heavens and Earth

God, the All-Wise, says in His Noble Book, *We have not created the heavens and the earth, and what between them is, save with the truth and a stated term; but the unbelievers are turning away from that they were warned of.*[304] In a similar verse, He states, *What, have they not considered within themselves? God created not the heavens and the earth, and what between them is, save with the truth and a stated term; yet most men disbelieve in the encounter with their Lord.*[305]

By the grace of God, in the second discourse we briefly discussed what the "appointed term" (*al-ajal al-musammā*) mentioned in this verse means. We explained how it is that all heavenly and earthly beings have an allotted lifetime in this world. However, *al-ajal al-musammā*, the "appointed term" that is "with" God, has no end, as the Qur'an says: *Naught is there, but its treasuries are with Us, and We send it not down but in a known measure.*[306]

These terms and measures that are referred to are simply lower manifestations of that "stated term" that is with God. The "term" actually refers to a single reality, but proceeds down two paths: one, the "term," is directed towards the world of multiplicity and descends to the realm of nature, of constant corruption and disintegration; whereas the other, namely the "stated term," aims toward the realm of unity, stasis, detachment, and incorporeality. As the two aforementioned verses clarify, all beings in the heavens and on earth and everything in between them are real and all have a "stated term." In other words, they were created because of or along with Truth and Reality, and their stated term.

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[304] Qur'an, 46: 3
[305] Qur'an, 30: 8
[306] Qur'an, 16: 96

This "stated term" is that same eternal existence with God, that otherworldly life of bliss, happiness, and success. It is that eternal life which has no end; the person who lives it faces no blame or censure, that is to say, a realm entirely unlike this world, which is mixed and molded with difficulty, afflictions, and hardship. Rather it is a realm filled with light and detachment, with the True and the Real. Our world is in reality simply a lower and weaker reflection of that higher realm. For when that realm dons the mantle of delimitation and definition, of dispersion into multiplicity, it descends and becomes manifest in the form of limitations and entifications (*ta'ayyunāt*): *Naught is there, but its treasuries are with Us, and We send it not down but in a known measure.*[307] Those boundless treasures that are with God are the wellspring of all existences. And creation is the pouring forth of these expansive treasures, the emanation of these incorporeal and infinite wellsprings. That ultimate wellspring is the source of all this multiplicity. That Absolute is the source of all this contingency; that Universal is the fountainhead of all this particularity. That wellspring must therefore by definition be filled with infinite and boundless life. Moreover, the creation of this world cannot be purposeless—for naught. If we do not see this world of death and corruption as simply a precursor for that eternal abode, and as a means of attaining that truth and reality, then the creation of the world would be for naught. But if this journey has a destination, and this search has an end—if this separation will lead to a reunion, then the true resting place of this world of constant motion will be the Hereafter, wherein it will arrive, alight, and remain.

Philosophical reasoning demands that all motions and acts must have a cause and an end. On the basis of this argument, we can prove that this world cannot be false. Having proven that the source of this world is one of Real-Truth, its end and final cause cannot be one of falsehood. Falsehood does not have a reason or a goal. Truth, however, whenever it is in motion, is always moving towards truth and will reach its ultimate end, which is the Truth. An action based on intention finally

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[307] Qur'an, 15: 21

leads the actor to that end that is the intended end of truth; it is the intended end for the motion-moving cause. The soul in motion, which is the efficient cause of motion, is also the final cause of that act; therefore it is impossible for the intent and end of an act to be itself, an act whose whole being is one of motion and change. It cannot be that the intended purpose of the created world is the created world itself, for it is essentially in motion, and this motion and friction, this constant movement and transformation, must be moving towards stability, peace, stillness, and rest. If this were not the case, then this world would be for naught.

It is true that those beings which have no motion and are at rest, both accidentally and essentially, from the very beginning of their existence and do not move from imperfection to perfection will not experience resurrection. After all, they have no beginning for them to move towards an end; they do not descend, so they do not ascend. Such characteristics belong only to the Universal Divine Names and Attributes, as well as to the Supreme Name, and spirits that are superior in rank to all the angels. It includes also the select few purified by God (*mukhlaṣīn*), those who oversee this world of multiplicity and are the intermediaries through whom existence emanates from the Absolute Source of emanation to all possible beings. Other than the two verses mentioned before, there are many other verses in the Qur'an that speak of the purpose of creation.[308]

In the previous discourses, we stated that this entire universe is a living reality, conscious, and powerful, even if we may not perceive it. The truth is that all animals, plants, and inanimate objects are in the same way alive, conscious, and filled with power. God mentions this in these two verses, that He did not create the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them save with the truth and a stated term. They are not false, and they will have their Return (*ma'ād*). He does not differentiate between any of His many creations; rather He gives the command for the return in a universal sense, meaning

[308] See for instance 38: 27; 3: 191; 21: 16–18; and 13: 17.

that it is not exclusive to mankind and *jinn*. As for living beings, whether on the land, in the sea, or in the air, the following verse states explicitly that all of these creatures and not just humans form nations and communities; that they are not created in falsehood; and that they will be resurrected, meaning that they have an intended end, which is their journey back towards their Lord. *No creature is there crawling on the earth, no bird flying with its wings, but they are nations like unto yourselves. We have neglected nothing in the Book; then to their Lord they shall be mustered.*[309]

This separation and deflection which we see in this world began in the realm of unity and unicity, in the realm of Divine treasures, and it will return to that realm. This is analogous to the particular Divine Names and Attributes that are the lower and descended form of those Universal Names, and those Universal Names are the return and end of the Lower Names, with each level of the hierarchy returning respectively to the level above it, until they get to those Names and Attributes that are free of all entification, particularity, and multiplicity, and are even free of a difference of terms and descriptors that may refer to their meanings: *Glorified be thy Lord, the Lord of Majesty, from that which they attribute [unto Him], except for those servants purified by God.*

Therefore, just as humankind comprises various nations and communities, all animals and living beings form separate nations and communities; and just like man, they will be resurrected, for *We have neglected nothing in the Book*[310] and have neglected from the Divine Book of Existence no being that has an end and that journeys in truth towards that end. For the Book of Existence contains all things and has no blemish; nor is any part of it in vain, for *This is Our Book that speaks against you the truth.*[311] Its truthfulness requires that it not allow the variation and diversity of beings and forms to eliminate or remove all sundry beings, such as the inanimate. Rather, this diversity

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[309] Qur'an, 6: 38
[310] Qur'an, 6: 38
[311] Qur'an, 45: 29

permits each being to reach its own ordained end, and the particular motion that is destined for it. It does not mean that before each being reaches that end, it will be abandoned and extinguished. If this were true, then this diversity would have been for naught; and the book of existence would be incomplete and imperfect. Therefore, all beings, just like humankind, comprise various nations, and all will be gathered and returned to their Lord. This return and resurrection of all animate beings is attested to in a universal manner in the following verse: *And of His sign of power is the creation of the heavens and earth and the crawling things He has scattered abroad in them; and He is able to gather them whenever He will.*[312]

The previous verse refers to this final mustering (*ḥashr*) as a "gathering" (*jam'*). To understand what it means by the latter term, we must pay attention to what the following verses say about the final mustering of all beings: *None is there in the heavens and earth but he comes to the All-merciful as a servant; He has indeed counted them, and He has numbered them exactly. Every one of them shall come to Him upon the Day of Resurrection, all alone.*[313]

In this context the term "servant of God" (*'abd*) refers to absolute servanthood and perfect and total attention to the Divine, full obedience to Him, as the term *fard* refers to one who has severed all ties to the effects and contingencies of this world, as *their cords are cut asunder.*[314]

In other words, whoever undertakes the journey to God does so utterly alone, in all senses of the word. He cuts off all his attachments and holds on to none of them. He is a slave in the truest sense of the word: *Now you have come to Us one by one, as We created you upon the first time, and you have left what We conferred on you behind your backs. We do not see with you your intercessors, those you asserted to be associates in you; the bond between you is now broken; that which you ever asserted has now gone astray from you.*

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[312] Qur'an, 42: 29
[313] Qur'an, 19: 93–95
[314] Qur'an, 2: 166

Now that the meaning of *fard* is clarified, the meaning of the term *jam'* will also be clear: the realm of *jam'* (gathering) is where all the contingencies, virtual multiplicity, and imagined forms, all the ambiguous and illusive identities and imagined scattered limitations, are destroyed. In this world we live in the realm of distinctions and diffusion; in the realm of *jam'* all will be gathered. Here, truth and reality are muddled and mixed, as all things don the mantle of multiplicity and its accoutrements. There, "gathering" means that the soul will be bare in itself and will abandon all multiplicity and its effects. It means to let go of the illusions of duality, to forget, and indeed to bury all of these imagined contingencies and forms. Therefore, in that realm of gathering, all the false means of differentiation and distinguishing souls will be forgotten, and the truly good souls will be unveiled and will return to the source of goodness. They will gather together—mixing with each other as honey and milk—and will enter through the gates of Heaven. Similarly, the truly evil souls will also gather, melding together in a terrible and poisonous union, and will be banished to Hell. This is what is meant by *Yawm al-Jam'*, which is one of the names of Judgment Day: *Upon the day when He shall gather you for the Day of Gathering.*[315] Therefore, for all beings to return to God "one by one," it would necessarily entail this process of gathering, because it is through this gathering that all the false distinctions and constructions are done away with, and all the multiplicity is forgotten; that all are again gathered back into their original form at their source. This meaning of gathering is also very enlightening in the issue of intercession and the associations of beings, as well as in understanding the following verse: *Then the unbelievers shall be driven in companies into Gehenna; and then those that feared their Lord shall be driven in companies into Paradise.*[316] Clearly, *companies* (*zumar*) here refers to certain groups of people who are collected according to this same process of gathering: *And the unbelievers will be mustered into Gehenna,*

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[315] Qur'an, 64: 9
[316] Qur'an, 39: 2–3

that God may distinguish the corrupt from the good, and place the corrupt one upon another, and so heap them up all together, and put them in Gehenna; those are the losers.

As for the beings without souls or the inanimate beings, verses from the Qur'an describe their resurrection. It tells of the idol-worshipers and their idols, where, on the Day of Judgment, the idols will incriminate their worshipers for their acts of worshiping senseless beings. *And when mankind is mustered, shall be enemies to them, and shall deny their service.*[317]

Since the Day of Judgment is the realm of knowledge and life, it teems with life and knowledge of all beings. For every being, big or small, even the most infinitesimal and insignificant, is steeped in this knowledge and life. Indeed, in the most subtle yet profound way, these types of verses use the term *dhawi'l 'uqūl* (those who possess intellect) to refer to inanimate beings. We have already mentioned in our previous discourse how those who bear witness must be conscious as they witness. We discussed how knowledge of both life and consciousness pervade all beings. In the 40th discourse, we also presented some invaluable material from Mullā Ṣadrā's treatise [*On Resurrection* (*Risalāh al-ḥashr*)]. And there are plenty of traditions regarding the resurrection of all creatures (other than that of mankind and the angels), whether those that abide in the heavens, on earth, or anywhere in between. For example, the traditions that state the dog of the People of the Cave (*Aṣḥāb al-kahf*) and the she-camel of Prophet Ṣāliḥ will both reside in Heaven. Or that wild beasts and dogs will enter Hell, ripping to shreds the bodies of the evil-doers therein. We have mentioned some of these traditions in previous discourses.

Animals also possess this consciousness and awareness, and therefore will have a Day of Return as well. Just like mankind, they also have a realm, an origin, and a return within which they operate, as attested to by the phrase *they are nations like unto yourselves*. In addition to all the physical powers they possess, namely the powers of growth, of attraction and repulsion, and of generation and nutrition, they also possess inner

[317] Qur'an, 46: 6

faculties, like those of the soul and of form, of wishing and willing, and then deciding. In all these faculties, they parallel humankind in both existence and essence. Of course, these faculties are limited in relation to their particular beings, and the capacities and capabilities of their existence. Indeed, the Qur'an calls on us to reflect and contemplate about their existence: *Have they not regarded the birds above them spreading their wings, and closing them? Naught holds them but the All-merciful. Surely He sees everything.*[318]

The story of the People of the Elephant (*Aṣḥāb al-fīl*) is widely reported and attested to by historical sources, referenced in the poetry of the Age of Ignorance (*jāhilīyah*), and, of course, described in the Qur'an. This is the story of a people who intended to destroy the Ka'bah, when suddenly small birds descended upon them and destroyed them: *And He loosed upon them birds in flights, hurling against them stones of baked clay.*[319]

Then there is the story of Prophet Solomon—indeed a marvelous and amazing story. God not only gave Solomon authority over mankind and *jinn*, but also marshaled birds for his army and granted him the power to understand their speech. Prophet Solomon would send these birds on different missions: *And he said, "Men, we have been taught the speech of the birds, and we have been given of everything; surely this is indeed the manifest bounty." And his hosts were mustered to Solomon, jinn, men and birds, duly disposed... Till, when they came on the Valley of Ants, an ant said, "Ants, enter your dwelling-places, lest Solomon and his hosts crush you, being unaware!"*

As we can read in this verse, first an ant speaks, meaning that he both comprehends and communicates with others. Second, the ant recognizes both Solomon and his army. Of course, this is quite a significant faculty for a tiny ant. Third, the ant understands that Solomon, whether wittingly or unwittingly and negligently, may crush his fellow ants. And finally, the ant

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[318] Qur'an, 67: 19
[319] Qur'an, 105: 3–4

calls Solomon and his troops lacking in intellect. In response, however, Solomon does not punish the ant. Instead he laughs at his words and recites a prayer for his own soul: *My Lord, dispose me that I may be thankful for Thy blessing wherewith Thou hast blessed me and my father and mother, and that I may do righteousness well-pleasing to Thee; and do Thou admit me, by Thy mercy, amongst Thy righteous servants.*

The hoopoe bird also asserts that Solomon lacks intellect and is ignorant. When Solomon summons all the birds, the hoopoe does not attend, and Solomon in turn vows to punish him for his disobedience. When the hoopoe returns later, he tells Solomon, "*I have comprehended that which thou hast not comprehended, and I have come from Sheba to thee with a sure tiding.*"[320] Then the hoopoe proceeds to describe for Solomon what he witnessed of the reign of Bethsheba, the sun-worshiping in her realm and the disobedience of her people towards God. Solomon then replies, "*We will investigate into whether what you have said is true." Said he, "Now We will see whether thou hast spoken truly, or whether thou art amongst those that lie. Take this letter of mine, and cast it unto them, then turn back from them and see what they shall return.*"

These verses, through the story of the hoopoe, present us with some very important points: first, that although the hoopoe was not present in Solomon's court, he was aware that he was summoned. He explains to Solomon that his absence was due to an important event. Second, he knew the ruler of that other realm was a woman, great and powerful, meaning that he could differentiate between male and female humans. Third, he had insight into Solomon's mind, namely that he was unaware of this issue. Fourth, he knew that those people worshiped the sun and disobeyed God, and that Satan had misguided them away from God. Solomon of course does not deny the hoopoe's claim; rather he investigates whether the hoopoe is being truthful by sending a letter to the Queen.

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[320] Qur'an, 27: 22; 27: 27–29

These are realities within the animal kingdom. As we know, after the demise of Imām Sajjād, his she-camel, refusing to eat and drink, stayed by the Imām's grave, rubbing her head against his grave until she too died.[321] Then there is the famous narration by Imām Bāqir, according to which the horse of the Master of Martyrs, Imām Ḥusayn, would rub his head in the Imām's blood, neighing the following in a loud voice: *"The great tyrant, the great tyrant from the nation, has killed the son of their Prophet's daughter."*[322] On the martyrdom of the Commander of the Faithful, Imām 'Ali, and the martyrdom of the Master of Martyrs, Imām Ḥusayn, blood spilled forth from underneath every rock in Jerusalem. Then there is the incident of the staff of Prophet Moses, which turned into a serpent by the Will of God, and began to move; or the wind, an inanimate being, which came under the command of Prophet Solomon.[323] Beyond these inner realities, if we look at the physical faculties of animals, we will realize them to be much more powerful than humankind's faculties. For example, a dog can sense the tremors of an earthquake well before man; and a cat or an ant's sense of smell is incredibly strong.

This is all evidence of the resurrection of all animals, which just like humankind are divided into various communities, and which relative to their own existential capacity have such incredible faculties and abilities that are particular to them, and that are, with only a few exceptions, entirely hidden from human perception. The verses and traditions and narrations we discussed all refer to the resurrection and return of all beings, whether they are earthly or heavenly. The point is that insofar as this realm is the realm of unity and integration, its beings are interrelated, and just as all the beings and powers that function in this world are somehow interwoven, and have a single origin and were created by God, and descended from higher planes, in the same way, this realm journeys back to that single origin as a single unit, and therefore towards God. There is no sense

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321 See *Muntahi al-Āmāl*, vol. II, p. 28

322 *Taẓalum al-Zahrā*, p. 129 as quoted in *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. X, p. 205

323 These incidents have been described in the Qur'an in 27: 9 and 38: 36.

for part of it to journey back to its origin to the exclusion of other parts, and for those other parts to be stagnant and still, to be prevented from returning to their Lord and their final end, and to be, in effect, purposeless and in vain. And all beings partake in this journey, whether small or large, cognizant or ignorant, poor or rich, male or female, human or *jinn* or angel; whether terrestrial, aquatic, or aerial animals, plants or inanimate beings. There is no difference between these existent beings. All beings that have some power and consciousness and must actualize their potential and move toward perfection. Otherwise, this would be a self-defeating proposition, and this entire realm, one that is beautiful and secure, would be chaotic and in vain. The Qur'an addresses all beings and invites them all to return to that promised abode without any exception, and calls all beings to acknowledge their nothingness before God and seek refuge in Him because all beings, without exception, shall return to Him that is their origin: *Then after that you shall surely die, then on the Day of Resurrection you shall surely be raised up*; and *O men, you are the ones that have need of God; He is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable.*[324] This shepherds the contingent world and all of existence to its desired end as He is indeed the Ultimate of all ultimate ends (*Ghāyat al-ghāyāt*); just as He is "the Origin of all origins" (*Mabda' al-mabādī*).

The Qur'anic verses we cited all regarded the resurrection and return of the creatures of this world, the beings of the heavens and the Earth. As for beings that are beyond these two realms and their return, beings that are beyond the limitations of time and space, and that are at a state of complete actualization, nothing has been said of them. There is no discussion of their return. They are beings undelimited by any limitation. Their essences are not determined or measured in this way. They are indeed beyond determination and instantiation; they are above individuation and entification. They are created, from the very beginning, in a state of absolute actualization. No return is ever conceived for them, and indeed their beginning and end are one. Since they are beyond the heavens, these verses do not refer to them, and none of those descriptions of the Day of Judgment apply to them. They are in a state of absolute light, static and actualized, who will join those who are purified by God (*mukhlaṣīn*) and who

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[324] Qur'an, 23: 15–16, 5: 18, 11: 123

will not appear in the tumultuous fields of resurrection; rather, abiding in the most Proximate Veil, which indeed oversees those fields, they are present on the Day of Judgment as the magistrates of Heaven and Hell. Other than these beings, all beings will be resurrected on that Day, because they are in constant motion *and that the final end is unto thy Lord*.[325]

The philosophical argument for this is primarily based on the oneness of the actor and the end. In other words, the end of every single thing is its origin; any thing that is individuated or entified by another thing, must necessarily and ultimately return to that which individuated and entified it: *He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward; He has knowledge of everything.*

In consideration with the universal law of cause and effect whereby all causes are at a higher plane of existence than their effects, we can also argue that the levels of Heaven and Hell these beings inhabit also reflect this hierarchy of being. Heaven and Hell have different levels: the hierarchy of Heaven begins from above and descends to its lowest levels, with each upper level encompassing and undergirding the lower level, respectively. The levels of Hell are reversed, as it begins from the lowest level—the most severe—and ascends. And so, all higher levels of Heaven are in reality the agents (and sources) of the levels below, until we arrive at the lowest level. And all the lower levels of Hell are the actors of the levels above them, until we arrive at the highest level.

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325 Qur'an, 23: 15–16

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Sixtieth Discourse

Intercession and Related Issues

God, the All-Wise, says in His Noble Book, *On the day that We shall muster the godfearing to the All-merciful with pomp, and drive the evildoers into Gehenna herding, having no power of intercession, save those who have taken with the All-merciful covenant.*[326]

Intercession is one of the best and most important issues related to the Hereafter, an issue that has been discussed extensively both in the Qur'an and in the traditions. There has been much discussion and debate about this issue to the extent that some believe that intercession encompasses every individual, even the maliciously evil and those who hate the Ahl al-Bayt; while others go to the other extreme, denying any and all intercession in matters of religion, relegating it only to the realm of engendered things. They reject intercession regarding issues related to the legislative domain (*umūr-i tashrī'iyah*), issues like the pardoning of criminals, or God's forgiving a person who deserves Divine punishment. There is quite a vast body of literature from both camps. The best text on this topic is 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī's *al-Mīzān* [*fi Tafsīr al-Qur'an*] , and his treatise on *Life Beyond this World* (*Risālah al-Insān ba'd ad-Dunyā*).

The Lexical Definition of *Shafā'ah*

All Arabic dictionaries define *shafā'ah* in the following terms: "to strengthen, to add, and empower a thing or a person who is weak and who is in need of assistance and support." They use this word in light of the help and empowerment of that needy being, so as to bring him to a condition of independence, perfection, and prosperity. For example, a cane that is used by a

[326] Qur'an, 19: 85–87

lame person is called a *shafī'*. After all, the cane removes a need and overcomes a weakness. The person, by leaning on the cane, then, overcomes his weakness. However, this same word is not used to refer to man's foot, even though a foot also supports the person's other foot in walking. After all, a person cannot walk [properly] with only one foot. The difference is that the cane is used to support a person while walking and standing, whereas a foot is not used in this way [a foot is needed to even begin the process of walking]. *Shaf'* is contrasted with *watr*, a singularity and individuality that needs neither support nor aid.

Generally, we can say that a *shafī'* denotes the coupling of a means or an instrument with a thing or a person previously on its own. The purpose of this coupling is to allow that person to attain a desired end or goal that it was incapable of attaining on its own, because of the person's weakness and incapability. This is a common use of *shafī'* in daily discourse. But neither in the lexical definition nor in common usage is this term specified to intercession in either the engendering or legislative domain. Rather, it is used more broadly to refer to both. Intercession, therefore, is an instance of causation, meaning the intermediate and proximate cause that mediates between the First Cause, which is utterly distant, and the effect, regardless of whether it is an external and engendered effect or a legislative one.

Engendered (*Takwīnī*) and Legislative (*Tashir'ī*): Intercession in Relation to God

God intercedes both existentially and legislatively. As for His existential intercession, He is the source of all effects, and the process of affecting itself; all causes ultimately conclude with Him. God rules over the realm of existence; all beings that mediate between His Divine Essence and their effects—which simply function as the channels and means for the infinite Divine blessings and grace to shower onto the created realm—all originate from and return unto Him.

This entire chain of being and causation, insofar as it mediates that Divine emanation, contains the reality of intercession. And therefore, God is both the supreme subject and object of intercession, the *Shafī'* and the *Shāfi'*: *To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth. Who is there that shall intercede with Him save by His leave?*[327]

If any cause or means functions as such in governing over or regulating existent things in the external world or intercedes to perpetuate and continue their existence in the created world, they do so with the Permission of God alone: *Surely your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then sat Himself upon the Throne, directing the affair. Intercessor there is none, save after His leave that then is God, your Lord; so serve Him.*[328]

Legislative Intercession

Through His mercy and compassion, His benevolence and grace, God has sent messengers and sacred scriptures and has instituted laws and rules of conduct, and defined the good and evil along with the repercussions of each. With this, He has bestowed the blessing of undergoing the legislated means by which we may attain perfection. On this basis, the prophets called their people to God's mercy and compassion and warned them of the harsh repercussions of their treachery, crimes, and oppression: *Perfect are the words of thy Lord in truthfulness and justice; no man can change His words; He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing.*[329]

Remarks Regarding the Proof of Legislative Intercession

A few introductory remarks are in order here to explain the meaning and function of the legislative intercession. We use the word *shafā'ah* generally in social contexts as a means of

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[327] Qur'an, 2: 256
[328] Qur'an, 10: 3
[329] Qur'an, 6: 115

avoiding harms or acquiring some good. But we do not use it to refer to the acquiring or avoidance of just any good or harm without delimitation or qualification, say for issues related to the endangered realm like hunger, thirst, illness, or heat, sickness or health. We refer to appropriate natural means to resolve or cure these problems. For example, to remove hunger, we eat. To dispel thirst, we drink. With this in mind, the purview of intercession then becomes limited only to those benefits and harms within society that are constructed through laws and norms. After all, the relation between the ruler and the ruled or between a master and a servant only arises within a legal context, where there is a command and proscription, and where a responsible party can justifiably be punished because of his disobedience and contempt. Therefore, there are two sets of laws in effect here: a set of commands and prohibitions and a set of rewards and punishments. This formulation coincides with the ubiquitous order that exists throughout all levels of society, whether in the public or private domain, indeed between any person (or body) and those who function as his subordinates. This is the proper context for intercession, where a person either seeks a benefit or good that according to the standard set of rules he does not deserve, or he seeks respite from harm that according to the standard rules he deserves either because of an act committed, or a responsibility he neglected.

However, it must be borne in mind that intercession is not permitted universally in societal matters. It does not apply to a person who is utterly unqualified for a special role or position, or who does not have any special relationship with the person who will intercede. For example, an illiterate person cannot be appointed the chancellor of a university by means of intercession, or for that matter, the chair of a certain department. Nor does intercession benefit a person who is obstinate and will never accede to the authority of his superior. Ultimately, intercession complements the cause-and-effect relationship, and does not give rise to a separate and independent cause. In addition, intercession cannot be random, exaggerated, and purposeless, or apply to a person without convincing reasons. For

example, an intercessor cannot request a master to withdraw his rights as a master, or a judge to withdraw his verdict, or to withdraw a sentence both universally and in a particular instance. Therefore, an intercessor has no access to or say in the fundamental relationship or hierarchy between a master and a slave or a judge and an offender, nor in the realm of a decree or order, or on the level of recompense and punishment. He has no say in these matters. Rather, after acknowledging these limitations the intercessor may appeal to certain attributes of the master such as mercy and generosity that necessitate forgiving a violator, or cling to the particular flaws that are present in the violator such as helplessness, poverty, and misery that call for leniency, clemency, and compassion when dealing with him. Sometimes an intercessor may exploit his personal status before the master and appeal to him to be merciful and forgiving toward the offender. In reality [in such situations] the intercessor creates an entirely new [legal] category (*mawḍu'*) that overrules the previous matter and on the basis of which he asks the master or the judge to forgive the offender. In other words, bringing in a new matter the person is removed from the matter of the first ruling and placed squarely in the matter of the second through the arrival and application of a new subject title (*unwān*). Therefore the true reality of intercession does not contradict the law. Intercession thus becomes an instance of causality, which intervenes between the first cause and the effect. It stops the cause of the first ruling, which called for a particular punishment, and instead calls for forgiveness by creating a new legal category.

Divine Legislative Intercession

The preceding discussion makes it clear that intercession before God does not pose any legal problem in the legislative realm and that the call for intercession is permissible for acts of disobedience and transgression, albeit with particular conditions. Certain Qur'anic verses also speak to this. For example, *Upon that day the intercession will not profit, save for him to*

whom the All-merciful gives leave, and whose speech He approves.[330]

There are other verses that also establish the function of intercession for a group of angels and humans, who have attained it through the permission of God. After all, He possesses the realm of creation and affairs, and can bestow this or that affair on another being. Indeed, the reality of intercession is firstly and essentially His; He has relegated intercession only secondarily and accidentally to other than Himself.

Righteous Servants' Intercession by God's Command

It is a right of those righteous servants and angels brought nigh to God to cling to the rope of Divine mercy and inculcate in themselves measures of His Qualities of generosity and forgiveness, and through that seek God's forgiveness for His servant's sins who might be afflicted by his own sinful and evil deed. By engulfing him in Divine Providence, the intercessor frees his fellow servant of being afflicted by the recompense of his own actions. In other words, he removes him from being an instance of those who deserve Divine punishment. After all, the true effect of intercession is in terms of these rulings.

As we explained previously, God, in His mercy and forgiveness, can bring about whatever change and transformation in a particular act of His servant, or He can veil his evil deed and its effects. We presented various Qur'anic verses that indicate how God does this, changing evil acts to good ones, or taking a committed act and returning it to its initial cause, making it non-existent in the process, or making a good act serve as penance for an evil one. God alone can forgive a person's sins, or He can magnify a tiny act, which engrosses a larger one. He can even create a previously uncommitted act and attribute it to that person. And all such acts would be committed on the basis of Divine wisdom; they are not purposeless and arbitrary or exaggerated. Because of a certain intended good (*maṣlaḥah*), He can create the necessary and intermediate

[330] Qur'an, 20: 109

cause that intervenes in this way. So then what is the issue with the prophets, the Friends of God (*awli'yā*), and the righteous servants' being among those intermediary causes who intercede? What is the injustice here? Is any of this in vain?

Proving Intercession through the Qur'an

There are some verses in the Qur'an that absolutely reject the possibility of intercession with God. For example, the following verse: *And beware of a day when no soul for another shall give satisfaction, and no intercession shall be accepted from it, nor any counterpoise be taken, neither shall they be helped.* The verse is directed towards the Israelites. To really clarify this verse and to explain who it applies to, we need to preface this discussion with the following:

Intercession among the Idol-Worshipers

All worldly governments and sultanates, with all their stature and glory, are often established to fulfill certain needs that people have in their worldly lives, and to ameliorate the needs of those people. In so many instances we see changes occur in a particular case within those ruling systems without being based on any objective criteria, particularly in matters related to the penal code. Indeed, people have always tried to avoid retribution, whether it is through intercession, bribes, a sacrifice, or whatever other means at their disposal. Ancient idol-worshipers and other ancient peoples would not isolate this sense of material and natural causality simply to this world; rather they believed the Hereafter reflects this world with regard to causality. It is because of this worldview that they would offer various gifts and sacrifices to their gods as expiation for their sins, and would seek assistance from those gods to attain prosperity in their lives. They would also seek their intercession through particular people or objects. Sometimes they would bury their servants and hand-maidens, along with certain weapons, so that they could defend and protect themselves from any retribution. You can see evidence of this type of belief in the

various museums and historic sites of ancient Egypt. These and other similar ideas also appeared among the various Muslim peoples and were put into practice among the various linguistic and ethnic communities within the Islamic world and left an indelible mark within these communities. Very often these ideas took different forms and colors throughout the various generations and communities among whom they appeared. The Qur'an, however, stands in the face of all such false beliefs and illusions. It proclaims loudly, *That day the Command shall belong unto God,*[331] and, *and they see the chastisement, and their cords are cut asunder.*[332] Moreover, it explicitly states that man will appear alone before his Lord, and by himself, without any of these illusory contingencies and worldly means that cannot intercede for him. Many verses emphasize that the Hereafter is devoid of all worldly causes, that all worldly connections and material relations, even those of status and lineage, will be severed, that all those pharaohic and prideful acts will be extinguished. With this introduction in mind, let us mention two verses: *and beware of a day when no soul for another shall give satisfaction, and no intercession shall be accepted from it, nor any counterpoise be taken, neither shall they be helped*[333] and, *And beware a day when no soul for another shall give satisfaction, and no counterpoise shall be accepted from it, nor any intercession shall be profitable to it, neither shall they be helped.*[334]

These two verses explicitly demonstrate how false the beliefs of ancient peoples were. They explain that all the contingent "causes" of man will not help man, and that each person will taste the result of his own deeds. They reject false intercession, and make it clear that intercession that is independent and in opposition to the Truth is null and void. *They serve, apart from God, what hurts them not neither profits them and*

[331] Qur'an, 82: 19
[332] Qur'an, 2: 166
[333] Qur'an, 2: 48
[334] Qur'an, 2: 123

they say, "These are our intercessors with God."[335] and *The evildoers have not one loyal friend, no intercessor to be heeded.*[336]

The Qur'an Proves the Intercession of the Righteous

In relation to the above verses that seem to reject intercession in general, there are other verses that establish in an undifferentiated manner that intercession will in fact take place. Some of these verses limit intercession to God alone: *Say: "To God belongs intercession altogether"*[337] and *Apart from Him, you have no protector neither mediator; will you not remember?*[338] Some other verses extend intercession to others, but with the permission of God: *Intercessor there is none, save after His leave that then is God, your Lord...*[339] and *...having no power of intercession, save those who have taken with the All-merciful covenant.*[340] It must be emphasized that there is no contradiction between those verses that negate intercession categorically and those that establish it. The question is why there is no contradiction between limiting intercession to God and expanding it to those righteous servants.

In the 6th discourse we discussed quite exhaustively that no being can attain perfection independent of God. Rather it is God Who imparts such perfections to them. Therefore, any dimension of perfection that can be found in the beings in the world of the Kingdom and Dominion is primarily and essentially God's and belongs to Him. It is only secondarily and accidentally given to other being. This means that God bestowed on that being that particular quality and gave him the permission to utilize it. This category of being accidental or contingent does not negate the fact that such qualities primarily and

[335] Qur'an, 10: 19
[336] Qur'an, 40: 18
[337] Qur'an, 39: 45
[338] Qur'an, 32: 4
[339] Qur'an, 10: 3
[340] Qur'an, 19: 87

essentially belong to God alone. Indeed, there is no Divine conferral that reduces the power or removes an affair from the Hands of God; however much God bestows on His creature, He does not become poor or deficient in any way. From among the verses that speak on intercession and pertain to the Day of Judgment, some that negate the function of intercession are rejecting it with regard to an independent force other than God; while other verses establish intercession firstly and fundamentally for God, and secondarily for other than Him, through the conferring and the permission of God Himself. Therefore intercession by the permission of God is an established reality on the Day of Judgment.

We mentioned similar and seemingly contradictory verses in our discussion of the departure of the soul from the body, or regarding creation, the cause of laws and decrees, and many other relevant issues that entail this distinction between the essential and the accidental. For example, the following verse rejects the ability of anyone other than God to have knowledge of the unseen: *Say: "None knows the Unseen in the heavens and earth except God. And they are not aware when they shall be raised."*[341]

The following verse also characterizes this knowledge as exclusively God's: *With Him are the keys of the Unseen; none knows them but He...*[342] Whereas in the following verse, God allows particular prophets who enjoy His pleasure to possess this knowledge: *save only to such a Messenger as He is well-pleased with; then He despatches before him and behind him watchers...*[343]

[341] Qur'an, 27: 65
[342] Qur'an, 6: 59
[343] Qur'an, 72: 27

Proof of Intercession through Traditions Narrated in Sunni Sources

There is a consensus on *aḥādīth* from both the Shī'ī and the Sunni schools regarding intercession. The following are examples of prophetic *aḥādīth* from Sunni sources: "My intercession is for those among my community who have committed the gravest sins,"[344] and "My intercession for my community is for those who love my progeny (Ahl al-Bayt).[345] "My intercession on the Day of Judgment is real; whoever doesn't believe in it will not be of its people."[346]

Establishing Intercession through Shī'a *Aḥādīth* and Narrations

The Shī'a traditions demonstrate a remarkable degree of continuity in the chain of transmission (*tawātur*) regarding intercession. For example the following *aḥādīth* are narrated through Imām Ṣādiq: "Whoever denies three things, is not of our Shī'a: the night ascension, the interrogation in the grave, and intercession" and "The Prophet stated, 'Do not take lightly the Shī'a of 'Ali. For the man who is among them will intercede for as many people as the number of Rabī'ah and Muḍar.'"[347]

Let me conclude this discourse with an incident that His Eminence Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Gulpāygāni experienced that illustrates the efficacy of intercession in this world, that he shared with a few close friends:

> Once, in a particular stage of wayfaring, a strange state descended on my heart whereby I felt my soul had become the source from which all knowledge, power, sustenance, and life emanated to all other beings of the world, in such a way that all beings seek my aid and I bestow blessings on them.

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[344] Suyūṭī, *Jami' al-ṣaghīr*

[345] Ibid.

[346] Ibid.

[347] As quoted in *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 8, p. 56, referring to the two populous tribes in the Arabian Peninsula

I felt that I had become the source of emanation and gave life and existence to all contingent beings, while at the same time, I knew intellectually and in an undifferentiated manner that this is a false state, that God, the Almighty and High, is the Source of such emanation, and the ultimate root of all goodness.

I continued in this state for a few days. However, many times I would visit Imām 'Ali's shrine and inwardly appeal to him [to intercede] but there was no opening in my soul. I decided to visit the shrine of Kadhimayn, to beseech the Imām [Mūsā al-Kāẓim], and to seek him as an intercessor so that God would save me from this abysmal state.

The air was cold. I headed towards the sacred shrine. When I entered, I went directly to the sacred inner sanctum of the mausoleum. I prostrated opposite the tomb on the marble floor, and I cried so much that my tears began to roll down the marble floor. Before I even lifted my head, I felt that the Imām had already interceded for me. I felt different. I then realized who I was, what I was, and that I was indeed nothing.

I felt utterly insignificant, not even a tiny speck. I realized that I did not have an iota of power and all that there was of powers was under the purview of God. I then realized experientially that He is the absolute emanation. He is alive and gives life, He is the All-Knower and the Bestower of knowledge, He is the Omniscient and Bestower of power, the Sustainer and the Giver of sustenance. My being, my soul, is simply an insignificant conduit, a window through which the sign has appeared from that non-delimited Source of absolute light.

So I got up, and after the prayer and performing rites of visitation, returned to Najaf. For a few days and nights, I saw God as this absolute Source of emanation, as the Living and the Powerful Lord of all the worlds. Until one day, when I was returning home from the mausoleum of Imām 'Ali, a different state descended upon me. In the middle of an alley, this state overcame me and it was so powerful that I had to

stop and rest my head on the wall for ten minutes or so. I could not move. It was a state that is utterly indescribable. This was a state Imām 'Ali had bestowed upon me, a state far greater and more decisive than that which that had come upon me in the mausoleum of Mūsā ibn Ja'far. That first state was just a precursor to this latter state.[348]

These are all recent and living examples of the intercession of these great masters and Imāms. But we must be humble and unrelenting. Like the blessed soul of Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn, we must lower ourselves to bow in our utter poverty and abjection in the face of their blessing, and hope that an invisible hand graces us and does this work.

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[348] The full version of this memory is available in *Ma'ād Shenasī*, vol. IX, pp. 115–20

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Sixty-First Discourse

The Intercessors on the Day of Judgment

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *Those they call upon, apart from Him, have no power of intercession, save such as have testified to the truth, and that knowingly.*[349]

In this discourse we will attempt to understand a little more about the intercessors themselves. Who and what are those beings who will intercede for humankind, in this world or the Hereafter? In the previous discussion, we learned that there are two types of intercession: engendered (*takwīnī*) and legislative (*tashir'ī*) intercession. Here we will further divide legislative intercession into two categories: (a) legislative intercession that pertains to this realm; and (b) the legislative intercession that pertains to the Hereafter. Indeed, we will deal with a third type of intercession that will take place in the Hereafter.

Intercession in the Realm of the Engendered World

This is defined as the intermediaries between God and His creation and the means and causes of creation as such (lit. the realizing of creation/the created), and the emanations of creative light of God as it pours into the existential vessels of contingent beings. In other words, it is a form of intercession that seeks to expand the range of Divine Light in the contingent realm. And insofar as this intercession intends this form of expansion, it is not relevant to this discussion on the Hereafter.[350]

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[349] Qur'an, 43: 86

[350] Readers should refer to 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. 1, pp. 72–82; vol. 2, pp. 180–93; and vol. 20, pp. 283–85. See also his exquisite treatise, *Risālah al-Wasā'iṭ al-Mawjūdah bayn Allāh wa-bayn al-Nash'ah al-Ṭabī'īyah.*

On Legislative Intercession in this World

Generally speaking, any deed in this world that can save man, bring forgiveness for his sins, and increase his proximity to the Divine functions as an intercessor between a creature and his Lord. That thing, whatever it may be, is an intermediary between man and God, and will allow that creature's sins to be forgiven. That intercessor could be contrition and repentance. For example, the Qur'an states: *Say: "O my people who have been prodigal against yourselves, do not despair of God's mercy; surely God forgives sins altogether; surely He is the All-forgiving, the All-compassionate. Turn unto your Lord and surrender to Him, ere the chastisement comes upon you, then you will not be helped."*[351]

One category of penitence is specific to God, which is repentance from assigning a partner to God (*shirk*). Whoever accepts the unicity of God—*tawḥīd*—will be forgiven of the sin of associating a partner to Him. This very act of belief is a form of penitence, after which no more will the person be an instance of the verse, *God forgives not that aught should be with Him associated.*[352] After all, that person is now a monotheist, and not a man who associates a partner with God (*mushrik*). Therefore, one of those things that will intercede for a person is his very belief in *tawḥīd*, as it facilitates the pardoning of the sin of assigning a partner to God. Another of the intermediaries is faith, *īmān*, which allows for the pardoning of the sins of disbelief (*kufr*): *O believers, fear God, and believe in His Messenger, and He will give you a twofold portion of His mercy; and He will appoint for you a light whereby you shall walk, and forgive you; God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate.*[353]

Another of the intercessors is righteous acts through which corrupted and evil acts are forgiven. *God has promised those*

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[351] Qur'an, 39: 53–54
[352] Qur'an, 4: 48
[353] Qur'an, 57: 28

that believe, and do deeds of righteousness; they shall have forgiveness and a mighty wage.[354]

Here is another verse that refers to the power of righteous deeds to intercede in the face of evil ones, and in the process it become the means by which those evil deeds are forgiven: *O believers, fear God, and seek the means to come to Him, and struggle in His way; haply you will prosper.*[355]

Still another of the intercessors is the Qur'an. Whoever acts according to its injunctions, the Qur'an will guide him to good deed and will intercede on his behalf and help him to gain proximity to God. It will be his intercessor and will guide him towards eternal blessings. It will guide him towards that straight path, allowing him to journey quickly towards God, saving him from the darkness of the world. *People of the Book, now there has come to you Our Messenger, making clear to you many things you have been concealing of the Book, and effacing many things. There has come to you from God a light, and a Book Manifest whereby God guides whosoever follows His good pleasure in the ways of peace, and brings them forth from the shadows into the light by His leave; and He guides them to a straight path.*[356]

Among the intercessors is anything that is associated with or has some relation to good deeds, like sacred places or times, or visiting the graves of the prophets and the Imāms and of saints and scholars, and visiting mosques. Each of these can function in its own way as an intercessor for a person.

Then there are the divinely inspired prophets and messengers who seek forgiveness for their peoples and communities. Because of the very beings of these holy people, God forgives the sins of their communities. *[W]hen they wronged themselves, they had come to thee, and prayed forgiveness of God, and the Messenger had prayed forgiveness for them, they would have found God turns, All-compassionate.*[357]

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[354] Qur'an, 5: 9
[355] Qur'an, 5: 35
[356] Qur'an, 5: 15–16
[357] Qur'an, 4: 64

There are the angels of the heavens and the earth, who seek forgiveness for the faithful: *Those who bear the Throne, and those round about it proclaim the praise of their Lord, and believe in Him, and they ask forgiveness for those who believe: "Our Lord, Thou embracest every thing in mercy and knowledge; therefore forgive those who have repented, and follow Thy way, and guard them against the chastisement of Hell."*[358] and: *The heavens wellnigh are rent above them, when the angels proclaim the praise of their Lord, and ask forgiveness for those on earth. Surely God—He is the All-forgiving, the All-compassionate.*[359]

And the believers who repent and seek forgiveness for themselves and their brothers in faith, who become a means of forgiveness for their brethren, in reality intercede on their behalf, such that God speaks on their behalf in the Qur'an: *And pardon us, and forgive us, and have mercy on us; Thou art our Protector. And help us against the people of the unbelievers.*[360]

On Legislative Intercession on the Day of Judgment

Among the various categories of intercessors are those who will intercede on the Day of Judgment itself. For this group, we must first see who these intercessors are, and then examine what qualities and characteristics they have that allow them to intercede on that Day. The Qur'an states, *...Who is there that shall intercede with Him save by His leave? He knows what lies before them and what is after them, and they comprehend not anything of His knowledge save such as He wills. His Throne comprises the heavens and earth; the preserving of them oppresses Him not; He is the All-high, the All-glorious,*[361] and it also mentions that *Intercession will not avail with Him save for him to whom He gives leave...*[362]

[358] Qur'an, 40: 2
[359] Qur'an, 42: 5
[360] Qur'an, 2: 286
[361] Qur'an, 2: 255
[362] Qur'an, 34: 23

Therefore intercession requires a Divine “leave” to occur; it cannot occur otherwise. Now we have to see what it means to be “permitted” by God. And second, who are those beings who are given this permission [to intercede]? Take the following verse: *Upon that day the intercession will not profit, save for him to whom the All-merciful gives leave, and whose speech He approves.*[363] This verse equates the leave of God with His approval of what a person says, and vice versa, namely that God is pleased with the person upon whom He bestows His “leave,” meaning that the words and speech of that person are that person’s means of interceding.

If we compare it with the following verse, the following notion begins to emerge: that pleasing speech is righteous and truthful speech; therefore those who intercede must speak the truth, and they must be pleasing to God: *Upon the day when the Spirit and the angels stand in ranks they shall speak not, save him to whom the All-merciful has given leave, and who speaks aright.*[364]

In our discussion on witnessing and testimony, we mentioned that the criterion for the truthfulness and correctness of speech is that the deeds of an actor ultimately end with the witness himself. For the witness is the means by which Divine emanations flow to the actor, and is the channel through which blessings and Divine grace cascade upon him. In other words, God grants that being—in his capacity as an intercessor for an actor’s deeds—full access to the realities of that person’s deeds, making the intercessor present at the moment the deed is done. And God declares: *Those they call upon, apart from Him, have no power of intercession, save such as have testified to the truth, and that knowingly.*[365]

This verse leads us to conclude that intercession necessitates a being’s function as a witness. Therefore, an intercessor must be a person who knows and bears witness to the Ultimate Reality. And because we understand from the previous verse

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[363] Qur’an, 20: 109
[364] Qur’an, 78: 33
[365] Qur’an, 43: 88

that the intercessors must have the leave of God, and their speech must be truthful, the intercessors with pleasing speech must be those same witnesses who testify to the Real-Truth, and who do so knowingly and wittingly. And just as the witnesses must be existentially present in their own particular ways when the testimony is given, the intercessors must also possess this quality of presence.

Now let us find out who these people are that are both present over all deeds, and whose speech involves Divine pleasure and approval. Generally speaking, contentment and approval are only elicited by something that has perfection. Therefore, that speech that God is pleased with must be perfected speech, which must in turn be truthful speech. And if speech is an effect of the essence of a thing, then a thing cannot utter perfected speech until its essence has also become perfected. Therefore, the perfection of an act depends upon the perfection of the origin of that act, and the source from which it emerges. God's being pleased by the speech of an intercessor means He is in reality pleased by the essence of that intercessor. And that which God is pleased with is in reality the essence of that being. Those whom God has given leave to intercede on behalf of others, and whose speech He is pleased with, have full knowledge of beings, and their essences are purified and pleasing to God.

The opposite of this, however, does not hold true. A person's essence could be pleasing [to God], but his actions and effects could be displeasing. This can be due to certain veils that are cast upon him, in effect sullying his actions. The reality of the station of an intercessor is *annihilation in God* (*fanā' fi'lLāh*). These intercessors are perfected in both essence and deed, and God is pleased with them in both regards. In other words, their knowledge is the knowledge of God, pure and beyond all illusions and imaginary things. It is indeed purified and free because their knowledge ultimately is God's knowledge, and *they comprehend not anything of His knowledge save such as He wills...*[366] In other words, because

[366] Qur'an, 2: 255

they have been annihilated in God, God's knowledge has manifested within them. They have attained a status whereby they truly see God as the source of all their knowledge. All the veils of multiplicity have been removed from their inner sights; they have attained that level of Unicity and Divine knowing, and therefore it is a mistake to attribute any knowledge to themselves: *The day when God shall gather the Messengers, and say, "What answer were you given?" They shall say, "We have no knowledge; Thou art the Knower of the things unseen."*[367]

Such intercessors have remained in their original and primordial immaculate station, and remained loyal to and fulfill their covenant with God. They do not deviate from the straight path for even a fraction of a second. That Divine knowledge which has shone upon them is simply a trust that God has placed with them. Therefore, they will never attribute it to themselves and know that it entirely and fully belongs to its true Owner. Thus, the station of intercession that necessitates witnessing, true speech, and knowledge is based on that very Divine covenant: *having no power of intercession, save those who have taken with the All-merciful covenant.*[368]

This is the same type of knowledge that is attained upon annihilation that we explained in our discussion of witnessing. We do not have access to this type of knowledge. Therefore, in relation to the verse *Those they call upon, apart from Him, have no power of intercession, save such as have testified to the truth, and that knowingly,*[369] we must state that this intercession is based upon that witnessing, and this witnessing is based upon that Divine Presence and the knowledge of the Unseen. This type of intercession cannot take place without having reached that station of annihilation in God: *Intercession will not avail with Him save for him to whom He gives leave; till, when terror is lifted from their hearts, they will say, "What*

[367] Qur'an, 5: 109
[368] Qur'an, 19: 87
[369] Qur'an, 19: 87

said your Lord?" They will say, "The truth; and He is the All-high; the All-great."[370]

We should note the verse uses the term *terror* (*faza'*), which means they dispel their fear, becoming awe-struck. This causes man to become entirely selfless and perplexed, entirely bewildered and unconscious of one's own self. This is actually the regaining of a new consciousness after being unconscious, and a state of perplexity (*buht*) is when one first emerges from that state of selflessness and annihilation. There, they respond *God spoke the truth*. Thus, intercession is attained only after this stage of annihilation. So in light of this explanation if we compare the following two verses: *Surely your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then sat Himself upon the Throne, directing the affair. Intercessor there is none, save after His leave;*[371] and *...then seated Himself upon the Throne. Apart from Him, you have no protector neither mediator...*[372] the following conclusion emerges. First, God must give leave to someone to attain the station of intercession and this permission is granted only after the intercessor is annihilated; therefore, the intercessor's act of intercession is indeed the act of God Himself. The intercessor's act qua intercessor is God's act. Hence, in the second verse, He attributes intercession exclusively to Himself. This means that the intercessor himself attains that station of pure and utter annihilation through this Divine leave. And this Divine leave is the elevating of the person's station to that of Divine knowledge and cognition, a station that by definition necessitates attaining the station of annihilation in God. Therefore, those who intercede by God's leave, intercede in terms of God's intercession. Their intercession is God's intercession. There is no duality or *otherness* here, to attribute to it. Since the individual who is annihilated in God knows by means of Divine knowledge, his annihilation is the Divine leave; hence the injunction, *Who is there*

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[370] Qur'an, 34: 23
[371] Qur'an, 10: 3
[372] Qur'an, 32: 4

that shall intercede with Him save by His leave? He knows what lies before them and what is after them.[373]

On the Reality of the Prophet's Intercession

The Prophet attained such an exalted and expansive station in annihilation in God and subsistence in the Divine Truth that all prophets and messengers fall under his dominion and seek his intercession. This is not a constructed and contingent station; it is an existential reality earned by him but also a gift of God bestowed upon the being of that holy personage. This bestowal is God's to give; it is that same expansive mercy and compassion of the Ultimate Real. It is that Compassionate Breath and Most Proximate Veil, that same absolute Praiseworthiness (*Maḥmūd*). In explaining this, God states, *the day a master shall avail nothing a client, and they shall not be helped, save him upon whom God has mercy; He is the All-mighty, the All-compassionate.*[374]

This excluded compassion is that same Divine leave and permission which was also excluded in other verses. Therefore, it becomes clear that intercession depends upon compassion, that this permission is in reality Divine compassion, causing intercession as is stated in another verse: *We have not sent thee, save as a mercy unto all beings.*[375]

As the verse indicates, God's absolute compassion and permission is for that holy personage, the Messenger of God. The intercession from this station is far beyond just the station of intercession. Hence, his holy person is the Intercessor of all intercessors, just as he is the Witness of all other witnesses. God creates things out of His own compassion and mercy, and the Prophet is God's expansive mercy. Thus, he is the greatest manifestation and that Most Proximate Veil. His intercession is from the station of the Praised One (*Maqām Maḥmūd*) as it is mentioned in the Qur'an: *And as for the night, keep vigil a*

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[373] Qur'an, 2: 255
[374] Qur'an, 44: 41–42
[375] Qur'an, 21: 107

part of it, as a work of supererogation for thee; it may be that thy Lord will raise thee up to a laudable station.[376]

This is the station that encompasses all perfection and beauty. This is indeed the station of unbound praise, and praiseworthiness requires this, for all perfection and beauty actually emanate from this station and derive strength and origin from it. As the Qur'an states, *Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being...,*[377] that is to say, God in fact has attributed every single act of praise to Himself, making the station of "the Praised" an intermediary between God Himself and the station of praise.

From one point of view praise is a reality, and from another perspective it is not. It is a reality because it is the absolute mercy of the Ultimate Truth, and the presence of the Most Proximate. It is also not a reality because it is the ultimate mirror and reflection, the ultimate non-being and annihilation. In another verse this state of absolute mercy is described as a gift and an absolute bestowal: *Thy Lord shall give thee, and thou shalt be satisfied.*[378]

In terms of bringing about a total annihilation in the Holy Essence of the One, this station of utter bestowal and absolute expansive mercy is a blessing. This station has the particular characteristic of being pleased (*raḍī*). This exclusive blessing that is a special gift (*'aṭīyah*) bestowed upon the Prophet is spontaneous and not gradual, as the verb indicates, for it is not a result or a recompense of actions and particular qualities, nor is it because of a personal precedent, for it to be gradual. Therefore, we can conclude that in addition to the station of the greatest intercession (*shafa'at-i kubrā*), the Prophet exclusively enjoys the station of the absolute leave (*idhn-i muṭlaq*) as well, a station that is much more exalted and more precise than the station of intercession.

In addition to the verses of the Qur'an, there are many references in this regard in numerous traditions and narrations. Imām Bāqir stated:

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[376] Qur'an, 17: 79

[377] Qur'an, 1: 2

[378] Qur'an, 93: 5

> There is no man, from the first people until the end, who is not in need of the intercession of Muhammad on the Day of Judgment. Indeed the Prophet has permission to intercede for his community, and it is incumbent upon us to intercede on behalf of our followers (*shi'atanā*), and for our followers' intercession on behalf of their people, and indeed for all believers to intercede on behalf of as many people as the population of the Rabīʻah and Muḍar tribes.[379]

There are many more traditions regarding the Greater Muhammadan Intercession on the Day of Judgment. There are also some traditions that comment on the verse referring to the station of the Praised One (*maqām al-maḥmūd*) that explain the utter dependence of all prophets and messengers and their appeal to him for intercession in this world and the Hereafter, both religiously and in the engendered realm.

Muhammad and the Need of Prophets for His Intercession according to the Gospel of Barnabas

The Gospel of Barnabas, which is the most authentic of the gospels, not only prophesies the advent of the final Messenger, but also attests to the need of all earlier prophets, indeed all of creation, of his intercession and compassion on the Day of Return.

Firstly, chapter 54, titled "Of the Judgment Day," mentions the following, starting from verse 7:

> Next shall God give life to all his prophets, who, following Adam, shall go every one to kiss the hand of the Messenger of God, committing themselves to his protection. Next shall God give life to all the elect, who shall cry out: "O Muhammed, be mindful of us!"

[379] ʻAyyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. II, pp. 310–13

> At whose cries pity shall awake in the Messenger of God, and he shall consider what he ought to do, fearing for their salvation.

Then it continues: "all people are on the Day of Resurrection in a state of utter despair, except the Messenger of God." Then, in chapter 55, "Muhammad on the Judgment Day" it explains how the Messenger is honored in the Divine Presence, that God created all things out of love for the Messenger, that all of creation praises God through the praise of the Messenger, that God tells the Messenger to ask for what he wills and he will receive it; thereafter the Messenger asks for forgiveness for the people. It then states, "Wherefore every creature shall do reverence to God, saying: 'To thee alone, O God, be glory and honour, because thou hast given us to thy Messenger.'"

Second, in chapter 136, from verse 8 onwards, the Gospel of Barnabas describes a scene wherein all the prophets are gathered to witness the enactment of Divine justice. The Prophet enters, and because of his presence, which lasts no more than an instant, Hell-fire subsides to allow its inhabitants a glimpse at that luminous being. The devils cry out, scurrying to find cover, while others endure Hell for 70,000 years. And Gabriel informs the Prophet of their state, saying:

> Then shall His Messenger speak to God and say: "Lord, my God, remember the promise made to me thy servant, concerning them that have received my faith, that they shall not abide for evermore in Hell." God shall answer: "Ask what thou wilt, O my friend, for I will give thee all that thou askest."
>
> Then shall the messenger of God say: "O Lord, there are of the faithful who have been in Hell seventy thousand years. Where, O Lord, is thy mercy? I pray thee, Lord, to free them from those bitter punishments."[380]

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[380] Chapter 137

> Then shall God command the four favourite angels of God that they go to Hell and take out every one that hath the faith of His Messenger, and lead him into Paradise. And this they shall do.
>
> And such shall be the advantage of the faith of God's Messenger, that those that shall have believed in him, even though they have not done any good works, seeing they died in this faith, shall go into Paradise after the punishment of which I have spoken.

Yes, indeed the Gospel of Barnabas corresponds closely to much of what we read in the Qur'an and the traditions regarding the intercession of the Prophet. And although we have presented these excerpts in a summary fashion, much of the details in these sacred texts also correspond to these verses.

The Messenger of God is therefore the very means by which the engendered realm itself was created; he is the cause of the creation of the various levels of being, both the corporeal and incorporeal, this world and the Hereafter. And he thus possesses the station of intercession in the realm that is governed by Divine law; he effects the elevating of the ranks of the good, and allows for the forgiveness of the evil.

In Shī'ī texts, there is a plethora of traditions that indicate the Imāms and the sacred person of the Prophet, as well as Lady Fāṭimah, all function in the spiritual and incorporeal realms as the Most Proximate Veils of God Himself, and are thus the means by which Divine beneficence and mercy is spread to creation. However, here it will suffice to relate a tradition that is transmitted in the books of the Sunni schools, the text by al-Ḥākim (Muhammad ibn al-Ḥākim Nayshabūrī (d. 405/1015)), who narrates from Ibn 'Abbās:

> God revealed unto 'Īsā (Jesus, peace be upon him): "O 'Īsā, believe in Muhammad. And command whoever among your people who meet him to also believe in him. For if it was not for Muhammad, I would not have created Adam. And if it was not for Muhammad, I would not have created Heaven and Hell. When I created the (Divine) Throne upon Water,

it would shake and tremble; thus I inscribed upon it, "There is no deity but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God." Then it became peaceful and calm.[381]

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[381] Ḥākim, al-Mustadrak, vol. II, p. 615

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Sixty-Second Discourse

Categories of Intercessors on the Day of Judgment

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *Intercession will not avail with Him save for him to whom He gives leave; till, when terror is lifted from their hearts, they will say, "What said your Lord?" They will say, "The truth; and He is the All-high; the All-great."*[382]

We will now, with God's grace and assistance, turn to discuss the various groups of intercessors on the Day of Judgment.

The Intercession of the Prophet, the Imāms, and Fāṭimah

Among the intercessors on the Day of Judgment are the Imāms, peace be upon them. The following is narrated by Imām 'Ali:

> Lady Fāṭimah, peace be upon her, said to the Prophet, may the Blessings of Allah be upon him and his family: "O dear Father! Where shall I meet you on the Day of Judgment, the Day of the Greatest Station (*al-Mawqif al-A'ẓām*), that Day of Fright and Terror (*ahwāl wa'l faza'*)?"
>
> He said, "O Fāṭimah! Meet me by the Gates of Heaven, while I raise the flag of praise (of God), and I will be interceding for my people to my Lord."
>
> She responded, "Dear father, and what if I do not meet you there?"
>
> He said, "Then meet me upon the Path (*al-Ṣirāṭ*), while I will be standing, saying, 'O my Lord, deliver my people.'"
>
> She said, "And if I do not meet you there?"

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[382] Qur'an, 34: 23

> He replied, "Meet me at the edge of Hell, where I will prevent its sparks and flames from burning my people."
>
> And Fāṭimah rejoiced at these glad tidings, may God bless her, and her father, her husband, and her children.[383]

In another tradition that is replete with much invaluable content, the noble Prophet discussed the exalted station of the Immaculate Five (*khamsah-yi ṭaīyibah*) and said,

> Any woman who prays the five canonical prays throughout the day and night, and fasts during Ramaḍān, and completes the pilgrimage to the House of God, and gives the ritual charity (*zakāt*), and obeys her husband, and accepts the *wilāyah* of Imām 'Ali after me, this woman will enter Heaven because of Fāṭimah's intercession on her behalf. She is the master of all the women of the worlds.[384]

The Prophets Appeal to the Five Infallibles for Deliverance

There are many traditions according to which all the prophets, without restriction, will seek the intercession of the Prophet, the Commander of the Faithful, Fāṭimah, Ḥassan, and Ḥusayn for their own deliverance. The prophets will seek the aid of the spiritual power of the five Infallibles to attain higher spiritual stations, overcome various difficulties, and gain forgiveness for their error. This means that in the realm of inner realities, those holy beings hold an especially lofty rank, one that even other prophets must traverse to attain proximity to God. These prophets need the light of the Divine to emanate through the being of these five pure personages, which in turn act as mirrors that reflect that light into the hearts of the prophets. This is what it means for these five Infallibles to intercede for the prophets, for God to make safe and cool the fire for Abraham because of them, for Noah to lead his Ark to Mount Jūdī where it finally landed with peace and ease, and for the cane of Moses

[383] Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Amālī*, Discourse 46, p. 166
[384] Ibid.

to turn into a serpent and then into a cane once more. This is what it means for Jesus to proclaim those clear signs and present those miracles to his people, and more generally, for him to attain those great spiritual stations. It was by the intercession and mediation of those five blessed souls that God gave the particular spiritual station that each prophet and Friend of God (*walī*) held.

From a philosophical point of view, it is impossible to bypass (*tafreh*) a certain necessary cause to reach a higher cause. Therefore, without seeking the aid of these signs of God, who are the most proximate veils of the Divine self, and those who attained the intermediary stations of (*maqām bayn al-bayni*) and the station of All-comprehensiveness (*maqām al-Jam'i*), it is impossible for a person who has undertaken the spiritual journey to the Truth to attain the stations of the soul and arrive upon the brilliant light of Divine Unity. Thus, bypassing their station would simply be impossible.

Examining a Historical Document

There was an interesting report in an official Soviet monthly Russian newspaper[385] about an archeologist who had found a piece of Noah's ark. The report was published in its 2nd edition in 1953. According to the author of that article a number of Italian archeologists were excavating in a region called the Valley of Qāf and found a set of large and decaying wooden planks buried deep inside the earth. After much research, they discovered that these wooden planks that were preserved for over 5000 years buried deep in the land were part of the famed Noah's ark. These archeologists were so intrigued by this discovery that they continued to dig in that area for another two years, until they finally found another plank in the form of a writing tablet, upon which was inscribed some of the oldest writing ever found, writing that was in a language unknown to modern archaeologists. However, what was even more surprising was that this tablet was entirely intact, and had not decayed

[385] The name of this publication is mentioned as *Etfad News*.

at all. It was so pristine that it is even today publicly displayed in Moscow's central museum.

Because of this invaluable find, the Russian archeological institute gathered seven of the most distinguished Russian and Chinese archeologists and specialists in ancient languages and scripts to decipher these writings. Their names are as follows: Professor Sulynov, Ivan Khinov, Michanin Luvarnak, Tanmul Gurnov, Professor Day Rakin, Im Ahmadkula, and Micher Kultuf. After eight months of intense research and comparing the script to other ancient languages and scripts, the group of archeologists and researchers arrived upon the following conclusions:

This wooden tablet is of the same type of wood as the other wooden planks found in that area, that seem to somehow fit in Noah's Ark; however, it differs from those other planks in that it does not have the same signs of decay that were clearly present in the other planks, and was intact to such a degree that the writing was clearly visible and legible after so many thousands of years.

The writing was from the original Semitic language, which is understood to be the first human language and the mother of all other languages, one that traces back to Shem, the son of Noah. The following is a translation of the inscription:

> O my Lord! And O my Helper and Aid! Help me and ennoble me! And in the name of those divine souls, who are great and noble, and because of whom the world continues to exist: Iliya ('Alī), Shabar (Ḥassan), Shubayr (Ḥusayn), and Fāṭimah. In the names of these five, I beseech you. For You are the only one who can guide me.

This indicates that Noah knew through revelation and divine prophecy the truth of these individuals, even though he lived many thousands of years before the advent of Islam, long before the birth of any of these five holy individuals and the schisms within Islam that resulted in its many factions. It is a sign of the truth of these five blessed souls and the school that is attributed to them.

Fatimah's Intercession on the Day of Judgment

There are many traditions that detail Lady Fāṭimah's ability to intercede; here we will summarize one such example. A *ḥadīth* is narrated from Imām Bāqir in the book *'Ilal al-Sharāyi'*, where he describes how on the Day of Judgment, there will be a distinct place for Lady Fāṭimah at the gate of Hell-fire. Whenever a sinful believer who has the effects of the love of the Ahl al-Bayt displayed on his forehead is banished there, she will call out to God, saying: "O my Lord and Master, You have named me Fāṭimah (the one who disengages and withholds) and you have withheld the Hell-fire from those who accepted my *wilāyah* and who accepted the *wilāyah* of my progeny. And Your promise is true and You will not renege on Your Oath."

God, the Most Glorious and High, will respond, "You have said the truth, O Fāṭimah! I have named you Fāṭimah, and I have withheld the Hell-fire from whoever loves you and accepts your *wilāyah*, and whoever loves your progeny and accepts their *wilāyah*. And My promise is true, and I do not renege on My Oath. And I banished this servant of mine to Hell-fire, so that you can intercede for him and so that I can accept your intercession. This I have done, to make clear to all the angels and prophets, and all My messengers and those who have any distinction with Me, what an exalted station you have, and so that it would be clear how dear and close you are to Me. Thus, take all of those believers who have the effects of your love and raise him to Heaven."

The Infallible Imāms' Intercession on the Day of Judgment

There are many more traditions and narrations that illustrate the intercession of the Imāms on the Day of Judgment. For example, it is narrated from Imām Riḍā, who said,

> If you have a need or a request from God, say, "O my Lord I appeal to You in the name of Muhammad and 'Ali, as they indeed enjoy a special station and a distinct place before

You, that You fulfill my prayer and connect me to Muhammad and his progeny. For on the Day of Judgment there will be no angel brought nigh to You, nor any messenger You sent, or any believer whom You tested who would not need [the intercession] of those two blessed souls.[386]

[Marfu‘] Barqī in his *Maḥasin* states,

Someone asked Imām Ḥusayn who there is that shall intercede before God with His leave, He Who knows what is behind them and in front of them and what He created.

The Imām responded, "We are those who interceded; we are the Foremost."[387]

The Angels' Intercession on the Day of Judgment

Among the many intercessors who will intercede on the Day of Judgment are God's angels. Other than the verses that refer to the intercessors in a general sense, which would necessarily entail the angels, the following gives proof for the angels' intercession: *How many an angel there is in the heavens whose intercession avails not anything, save after that God gives leave to whomsoever He wills and is well-pleased.*[388]

Intercession of Witnesses

In a previous discourse, we discussed this issue at length while commenting on the verse, *Those they call upon, apart from Him, have no power of intercession, save such as have testified to the truth, and that knowingly.*"[389] We cited them as one of the intercessors on the Day of Judgment according to which every being will witness acts according to their existential po-

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[386] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. VIII, p. 59
[387] Marfu' Barqī, *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin*, vol. I, p. 183
[388] Qur'an, 53: 26
[389] Qur'an, 43: 86

tential and capacity. These witnesses will then testify and intercede for others according to that same potential and capacity.

Intercession of Faithful Believers

Among the intercessors on the Day of Judgment will be the believers in God and His Messengers: *they are the just men and the martyrs in their Lord's sight; they have their wage, and their light.*[390] In this verse, the believers are counted among the intercessors. Therefore, this verse refers to the capacity of the believers to intercede by virtue of their function as witnesses. Other than this verse, however, there are many traditions about this category [of intercessors].[391] In his *Kitāb al-I'tiqādāt*, Shaykh Ṣadūq narrates the following tradition whereby the Prophet of God, may God's greetings and peace be upon him and his progeny, said,

> No intercessor saves [a person] more than [his] repentance. Intercession is through the prophets and their legatees, the believers and the angels. Among the believers are those who will intercede for as many people as the tribes of Rabī'ah and Muḍar. And the least of the believers will intercede for as many as 30 people. Intercession is not for those who doubt and attribute partners [unto God], nor is it for those who disbelieve and deny; rather it is for the believers, the People of *Tawḥīd* (those who believe in Divine Unicity).[392]

Intercession of the Qur'an, the Loyal Friend, and the Trust

In addition to all the above categories, it is stated in a tradition that the Prophet of God said,

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[390] Qur'an, 57: 19
[391] 'Allāmah Ṭihrānī cites around 14 different *aḥādīth* and narrations on this issue. Here we will mention only one of them. Interested readers can refer to volume IX, pp. 309–20.
[392] Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-'Aqā'id*, p. 85

There are five intercessors: the Qur'an, the loyal friend, the Trust, Your Prophet, and the Household of Your Prophet.

One of the instances of the manifestation of Divine mercy is guidance. So, whoever and whatever functions as a means for guidance towards God is a form and instance of Divine compassion.

Ta Sin. Those are the signs of the Koran and a Manifest Book, a guidance, and good tidings unto the believers...

Since the Qur'an is a source of guidance, it is also an instance of Divine mercy. And as we stated in the previous discourse, intercession is also an instance of Divine mercy. *[T]he day a master shall avail nothing a client, and they shall not be helped, save him upon whom God has mercy:*[393] this verse shows that the person whom God is compassionate towards is that same person whom He gives permission to [intercede]. Therefore, the Shī'ites are the loci for this Divine compassion. The reality of Divine permission is that same Divine mercy, which in turn necessitates intercession. Therefore, the Qur'an, which is a source of Divine mercy, must also be an intercessor on the Day of Judgment for those who abide by it and act according to it.

Fundamentally, intercession aids one in gaining proximity to God, which is the ultimate goal. Therefore, guidance is always a means of intercession; after all, it is a thing that aids us in attaining Him Who is intended, God. Therefore we see that the Qur'an will be one of the witnesses, as mentioned in the *ḥadīth* by Sa'd al-Khaffāf, cited in the 49th discourse. There, we briefly explained how it functions in this capacity. It states the Qur'an will intercede, and its intercession will be accepted; it will ask, and will be granted whatever it asks. The Qur'an's function as an intercessor can also be proven through its capacity as a witness, for it is one of the witnesses to the actions of beings, and all such witnesses will also intercede.

[393] Qur'an, 44: 41

As for the intercession of the "Trust," the Trust of course being *wilāyah*: the Qur'an states, *We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it and were afraid of it; and man carried it. Surely he is sinful, very foolish.*[394]

Then it states that the reason for offering this trust was to chastise the hypocrites and idolaters, and for God to turn towards the believers. *That God may chastise the hypocrites, men and women alike, and the idolaters, men and women alike; and that God may turn again unto the believers, men and women alike. God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate.*[395] It is clear from this verse that the turning of God towards the believers is that same notion of intercession.

As for the intercession of the loyal friend (*rahem*), the Qur'an describes the state of the People of the Left (*aṣḥāb al-shimāl*) and the difficult trials they must face. In its description [of their state] it mentions, *...he today has not here one loyal friend, neither any food saving foul pus*[396] who can help him. A *hamīm* is a close family member, like a father, a mother, a brother, and so on. This verse clearly states that because the People of the Left (*aṣḥāb al-shimāl*) are such transgressors, no family member will aid them. However if he were a believer and not a transgressor, then that family member would have aided him.

Intercession of Righteous Deeds

Finally, even righteous deeds will aid a person on the Day of Judgment, and will allow for a person's sins to be forgiven: *Except for those who repent, believe and do righteous work. For them Allah will replace their evil deeds with good. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.*[397]

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[394] Qur'an, 33: 73
[395] Qur'an, 33: 74
[396] Qur'an, 69: 35
[397] Qur'an, 25: 70

In short, as we discussed earlier, intercession is really the changing of evil deeds to good ones through the proximity between the intercessor and the person who is being interceded for. We also cited a tradition narrated by Sa'd al-Khaffāf about the Qur'an's being an intercessor for righteous deeds. This is why we have so many incredible stories of people who, because of a single act of compassion or kindness to someone of a lower status, or because of feeding the poor and the like, will be transformed. How often we hear of people who had originally cut themselves off from Divine guidance, but were changed by being gentle towards a sorrowful person, or a poor person, or someone with a dire need that he helped. These acts function as way for their hearts to be softened and opened to receive that guidance. This means that a person who does an act purely and sincerely for God, without any ulterior motives, can wipe away years of accumulated sins.

* * *

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Sixty-Third Discourse

The Recipients of Intercession

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *[A]nd they cannot intercede except on behalf of one whom He approves. And they, from fear of Him, are apprehensive.*[398]

In this session we will investigate to find out who will be the recipients of intercession. Will all sinners in Hell or only a particular group among them receive intercession, and what qualities must the recipients of intercession possess? The verses and narrations do not explicate who exactly will receive this intercession, nor do they guarantee the salvation of any particular group. This is so that some feeble-minded individuals—who may be a part of that group—are not emboldened to commit as many sins as they desire. On the other hand, intercession is promised in an undifferentiated manner so that even the worst sinners do not despair of God's mercy. Hence, the balance between hope and fear (*khawf wa rajā'*) that is an undisputed principle of religious and spiritual life that motivates us to constantly strive and struggle to attain some degree of perfection is maintained. And the Qur'an does not negate this underlying message.

Man would perish if he were in a constant state of fear—and if he believed that all roads to perfection were closed and he had no means to attain perfection. Overwhelming psychological pressure would overcome him and throw him into a pit of despair as he wasted all the potentialities and blessings God had placed in him. And if a person were to be in a state of absolute hope and safety, where he was completely fearless, his pride and his self-confidence would cast him into a life of sin and neglect. But if he sees himself as between these two extremes, in an intermediary station where he hopes for Divine

[398] Qur'an, 21: 28

deliverance and fears Divine wrath, he will strive to excel beyond his current station to attain some degree of perfection. This is the logic behind the injunctions of the *Sharī'ah* in the sense that no one can definitively claim to be a recipient of intercession; at the same time, no one can have utter despair from receiving intercession. Of course, there are general principles regarding intercession mentioned in verses of the Qur'an and traditions that include as a condition of receiving intercession belief in God, the Messenger of God, and the legatees and friends of the Messenger of God, and that state that the polytheists, disbelievers, and hypocrites will not be interceded for. The verse we are currently discussing states an additional condition, namely God's pleasure and contentment with that individual. But what does God's "pleasure" mean here? Must God be pleased with the nature and essence of an individual; or must He be pleased with that person's beliefs, or his deeds and behavior?

An examples of a Qur'anic verse on intercession is the following: *Every soul shall be pledged for what it has earned, save the Companions of the Right; in Gardens they will question concerning the sinners, "What thrusted you into Sakar?" They shall say, "We were not of those who prayed, and we fed not the needy, and we plunged along with the plungers, and we cried lies to the Day of Doom, till the Certain came to us."— Then the intercession of the intercessors shall not profit them.*[399]

According to this verse every soul is in the clutches of what he has wrought, and the evil acts that he has committed, except for the Companions of the Right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*)—even though they are not of those who were brought nigh to God (*muqarrabīn*) whose very existential transformation and annihilation in the Divine Essence frees them of their evil deeds. These people will reside in the Gardens. They will ask the sinners, "What caused you to fall into the Fire?" They will respond, "It is because of four characteristics: that of abandoning

[399] Qur'an, 74: 38–48

prayer; of forgoing giving to the poor; of plunging into the forbidden and the empty play of the world; and of denying the Day of Judgment and Retribution." These attributes caused them to not benefit from the intercession of the intercessors. And because these verses are Meccan, meaning they were revealed before the canonical prayer and paying alms (*zakāt*) were ordained, prayer to God is seen as any form of remembering and contemplating God, and "feeding of the poor" refers to any form of charity.

The opposite of these four attributes, then, must be what allows a person to benefit from that intercession, namely prayer for God's sake and remembering Him, charity for God and giving in His way, following the Friends of God (*awli'yā*) and holy men of religion, and avoiding the illusory realities of the world of contingencies, and concentration on the Day of Resurrection, the Day of "meeting God." These four deeds comprise the foundations and principles of religion. For religion, after all, is in following those who guide man towards God, invite him to direct his attention toward the Hereafter and the meeting of the Divine, and warn him to avoid eternal attachment to this lowly world. In other words, religion is to attest to the Hereafter, and to help people in time of difficulties and needs. Aligning oneself with these two principles, in turn, necessarily entails a focus on God and His remembrance, and second, giving charity and expending for His sake. Therefore, steadfastness in religion in terms of belief and deeds or knowledge and action is related to and contingent upon observing these four principles, which of course also necessarily entail belief in the other pillars of religion, namely belief in divine unity (*tawḥīd*) and the prophethood of Muhammad (*nubuwwah*).

Through this process of comparing the People of the Right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*) and the sinners, we come to know that the People of the right are those who will attain and benefit from intercession. They are the people whose faith is pure and if their deeds are also pure they do not need intercession. However, if they act in such a way that is not pleasing to God, then

they will be in dire need of intercession. Therefore, intercession is exclusive to the latter, the sinners among the People of the Right, those who have committed not just minor sins but capital ones. For those who abstain from capital sins, their abstention and purity from that category of sin will allow for the forgiveness of the minor sins they might have committed, obviating their need for intercession. *If you avoid the heinous sins that are forbidden you, We will acquit you of your evil deeds...*[400]

It is, therefore, those among the righteous who commit capital sins who will need intercession on the Day of Judgment; the People of the Right who have fallen are the beneficiaries of this Divine intervention. So, we see that narrators in both major branches of Islam, Sunni and Shī'a, have transmitted the following from the Prophet: "My intercession is exclusively for those among people of my community (*umma*) who commit major sins. As for the good, nothing is held against them."

In our discussion on the Book of Deeds we mentioned that in contrast to the People of the Left (*aṣḥāb al-shimāl*) the People of the Right are defined as those "who are given their books from the right," a metaphor for the Imām who guided them to the truth and felicity: *On that day you shall be exposed, not one secret of yours concealed. Then as for him who is given his book in his right hand, he shall say, "Here, take and read my book! Certainly I thought that I should encounter my reckoning." So he shall be in a pleasing life in a lofty Garden, its clusters nigh to gather.*[401]

The abovementioned verse is indeed a derivative of the following verse: *On the day when We shall call all men with their [imām], and whoso is given his book in his right hand—those shall read their book, and they shall not be wronged a single date-thread.*[402]

Therefore, the People of the Right are in fact followers of the true Imām and his *wilāyah*. There are many traditions that

[400] Qur'an, 4: 31
[401] Qur'an, 60: 19-22
[402] Qur'an, 17: 71

attest to this reality. The very reason they are called "the People of the Right" is that God is pleased with their faith and their deeds and behavior, and God's pleasure is the result of their observing the four pillars mentioned before. On the basis of these verses, therefore, we can deduce the following conclusion: that intercession is the exclusive preserve of those who accept the *wilāyah* of the righteous Imām and follow him, although they have committed capital sins. We can also conclude this reality from another pair of verses, one of which was mentioned in the beginning of this discourse: *And they intercede not save for him with whom He is well-pleased...*[403] This verse makes intercession exclusively for those "well-pleased" by God, meaning those whose being, religion, and beliefs God is well-pleased with, even if their behavior is not quite worthy of pleasing God. The second verse is the following: *Upon that day the intercession will not profit, save for him to whom the All-merciful gives leave, and whose speech He approves.*[404]

The above verse speaks about the intercessors. It does not speak in absolute terms, rather placing two conditions on those who wish to intercede: first, having the leave of God; and second, His approval of their speech. However, these same conditions do not apply to those who will receive intercession. After all, if God were pleased with both their word and deed, along with their faith and beliefs, then they would enter Paradise without the need for intercession. Other verses also attest to this reality: *On the day that We shall muster the godfearing to the All-merciful with pomp, and drive the evildoers into Gehenna herding, having no power of intercession, save those who have taken with the All-merciful covenant.*[405]

Shaykh Ṭabarsī mentions a similar conception of intercession, where the sinner neither commands the ability to intercede for others, nor has the privilege of being interceded for. Upon further examination, we see that this previous verse explicates this point regarding intercession: both the intercessor

[403] Qur'an, 21: 28
[404] Qur'an, 20 :109
[405] Qur'an, 19: 85–87

and the intercessee must have accepted that Divine covenant; anyone who both has not accepted true faith and does not act righteously is a sinner, even if he has accomplished either the former or the latter independently. And God Himself explains this covenant in the following way: *Made I not a covenant with you, Children of Adam, that you should not serve Satan—surely he is a manifest foe to you—and that you should serve Me? This is a straight path.*[406]

Here, the phrase *that you should not serve...* (*an a'budūnī*) is a covenant; it is a command, an order, meaning, "Fulfill my command and order." And the phrase *This is a straight path* (*hādhā ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) implies an obligation, a duty, meaning "dutifully adhere to the straight path, which possesses guidance and deliverance." Therefore, those who accept God's covenant, but still act in a way that is not righteous, are amongst the sinners, and will be banished to Hell. Yet, because of their faith and this Divine covenant that they have accepted, they will be interceded for, and will be freed from the Hell-fire. It is this covenant that the following verse speaks of. It is revealed in the context of the Jews, who would say, *The Fire shall not touch us save a number of days.*[407] In response, God says to His Prophet, *Have you taken with God a covenant?*[408] meaning only those who have taken this covenant with God will not remain in the Hell-fire but for a short period.

The available narrations also confirm that the only people who will receive intercession are those with whose faith God is pleased, but whose deeds are not pleasing God. In a tradition narrated by Imām 'Ali, which is recorded by Imām Riḍā, he states,

> The Prophet of God, peace and blessings upon him and his progeny, said: "Whoever does not believe in my Fountain, I will not bring him to it. Whoever doesn't believe in my intercession, by God, I will not intercede for him." Then he said, "My intercession is reserved only for those among my

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[406] Qur'an, 36: 60–61
[407] Qur'an, 2: 79
[408] Qur'an, 2: 80

community who have committed the gravest sins. As for the righteous, nothing is held against them."[409]

Ḥusayn ibn Khālid, who transmitted this tradition, states that he asked Imām Riḍā, "What is the meaning of the verse whereby God says, *And they intercede not save for him with whom He is well-pleased*?"[410] He replied, "*And they intercede not save for him with whom He is well-pleased* with his religion."[411]

There is another narration attributed to Imām Ṣādiq with regard to the meaning on the following verse: *...having no power of intercession, save those who have taken with the All-merciful covenant.*[412] He replied,

> A person will not intercede, nor will he be interceded for, nor will his intercession be accepted except if he has accepted a covenant with the Merciful, except a person upon whom He has bestowed Intercession because of that person's accepting the *wilāyah* of 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, and the Imāms after him. This is the covenant of Allah.

The Shī'ites Will Receive Intercession

Imām 'Ali al-Naqī narrates a *ḥadīth* from his forefathers extending back to Imām 'Ali, who states:

> I (once) heard the Prophet saying: "When humanity is gathered on the Day of Judgment, a caller will proclaim to me, 'O Prophet of God! God, may His Name be Exalted, has allowed you to reward those who love you and those who love your family, who befriend them for your sake, and who despise [their enemies] for your sake. So suffice them with what you will!' And I will say, 'O Lord of Paradise! Have

[409] Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Amālī*, p. 5
[410] Qur'an, 21: 28
[411] Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Amālī*, p. 5
[412] Qur'an, 19: 87

them reside wherever I will. For such is the praised status that I have been promised.'"[413]

The Shī'ites Will Be Reckoned by the Imāms

When Imām Bāqir was asked to comment on the following verse: *Truly, to Us is their return; then upon Us shall rest their reckoning*,[414] he replied, "On the day of Judgment, God will charge us with the reckoning of our Shī'ites. Whatsoever of God's that we ask Him to bestow upon us, will also be bestowed upon them; whatsoever [good] those who oppose them possess, they will also possess; and whatsoever [good] we possess, they will also possess."

Then he added, "They accompany us wherever we may be."[415]

We can gather from all the aforementioned traditions and narrations that:

1. Heaven is an abode exclusively for those who are pure of nature, mind, and belief, and Hell is the lair of the evil-natured;

2. Committing good deeds and abstaining from evil ones are for purification of the soul and the heart. They inculcate a nature that emanates good intentions and beliefs;

3. If good deeds are not internalized to purify the nature and soul, then all those good deeds are for naught. They would be equivalent, then, to evil deeds in that if a good-natured person happens to commit an evil deed, it will not tarnish his soul, and can actually be annihilated with a certain Divine upbraiding, or through repentance and/or intercession. Thereafter, the pure nature of that person will once again reemerge. In fact, all of these commandments and prohibitions are a means for us to purify our hearts and inner selves. *Prosperous is he who purifies it, and failed has he who seduces it.*[416]

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[413] Ibid.
[414] Qur'an, 88: 25–26
[415] Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Āmālī*, vol. I, p. 304
[416] Qur'an, 91: 9–10

God does not need any of our actions. Therefore, if we are able to purify our *selves*, then we will have attained the intended station. Otherwise, we will have simply engaged in a repetitive, formal, and superficial ritual, lacking all depth, without any benefit in raising our souls to the highest stations of perfection. Therefore, the criterion for felicity and blessedness is not whether a person has committed good deeds. A person should not be negligent of righteous faith and belief, of purifying his heart and his intentions. Moreover, the criterion for the evil and corruption of a soul is not the minor sins he might have committed.

If we view righteous belief and the purity of one's soul as the criteria for felicity, then small mistakes and minor sins cannot have a deep impact on the soul. Conversely, if the soul becomes evil and degenerate, then even righteous acts and good behavior cannot have but a superficial impact on the soul. This superficial righteousness, because it has no inner reality and is not reflected in the other, higher realm—where only inner realities can present themselves—will eventually disperse, and the evil soul will emerge once more. Similarly, for the good-natured people who have the right set of beliefs, the superficial evil and bad behavior they may possess will not remain in the realm of inner realities. This mirage of evil and corruption will disperse with even a minor disturbance, say, for example, in the difficult moments before death or even the brief punishment of the grave. Yet ultimately, this veneer of evil will be removed through intercession on the Day of Judgment, and the righteous nature, once hidden, will now shine through, manifesting itself like a beautiful meadow emerging from the shadows. Those minor sins he might have committed are not terribly worrisome, for God has promised to forgive: *surely God forgives sins altogether.*[417] Indeed, confusion and anxiety should really only plague those who have decrepit hearts, a state that will not be forgiven. In reality, this is a struggle for internal purification, not that of an external covering up. And

[417] Qur'an, 39: 53

this internal purification cannot be veiled by a slipshod and superficial veneer, which is immediately discovered.

An evil deed that proceeds from a good-natured soul is like the froth that appears on water that is pure; it is caused by a strong current, by difficult exigencies, whether in a moment of desire or anger. However, that froth is fleeting: *As for the scum, it vanishes as jetsam, and what profits men abides in the earth. But that pristine water itself never diminishes, continuing to exist and flow, as it glistens and quenches the thirst of many.*[418]

As for the ill-natured person, whose heart is corrupted and whose beliefs are false, any good action that may chance upon him will disappear as soon as it occurs, like the cold and white ashes that sit on fire. When the ash's petal falls on a flame, it will flare up and be consumed, as the fire burns all things that happen upon its path. After all, fire will do what fire is meant to do, and that is to burn and consume.

The example of these two elements (fire and ashes) is like that of two servants, one of whom is clever and canny and who intends to steal property from the people he serves, to undercut their authority, or even to usurp their position and status. The other is loyal and trustworthy, who will not steal from his master or abandon his duty, and who wishes well for his master and his family. The former, even if he commits an act of kindness towards his master, ultimately seeks his downfall; whereas the latter, even if he at times is negligent of his duties, is good-intentioned and trustworthy. Which of these two would the master prefer? And which would be honored by the master and win his respect?

This is where the criteria and wisdom behind all these traditions and narrations become clear. The bases and criteria for eternal felicity and the acceptance of our actions are our righteous beliefs, established faith, pure intentions, and abidance by our religion and the authorities of our religion. These bases are contrasted with the rejection of deeds and eternal damnation, ill intentions and hateful natures, corrupted beliefs and an enmity towards faith and masters of religion.

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[418] Qur'an, 13: 17

These criteria are fundamentally connected to love and point to its effects, namely that it connects the being and the soul of one person to the being and soul of another. Love unites the souls of the lover and the beloved and results in companionship and "togetherness." It transforms the actions of the beloved into those of the lover. Love turns the life of a lover into the life of the beloved, bringing them ever closer; psychologically, it brings the thought and mind of one to resemble the other, aligning their divergent beliefs and bridging their worldviews. And intercession is the exclusive preserve of those who engage in love, not of the hateful. It is reserved for the lovers [of the Ahl al-Bayt] and not for the those who hate the Imāms and their followers. Intercession is like the fire that with a single spark spiritually engulfs mounds of capital sins. And suddenly, with a flash, the sins are gone. Indeed, intercession morphs sins into righteous acts, transforming the criminal into the law-abiding. *[S]ave him who repents, and believes, and does righteous work—those, God will change their evil deeds into good deeds...*[419]

Good deeds function to strengthen the soul and the being of the person, raising a person's good words and pure soul towards God, as the Qur'an states: *To Him good words go up, and the righteous deed—He uplifts it...*[420]

Similarly, intercession allows these good words to ascend towards God. The phrase "good words" refers to the faith of the faithful. It is intercession that allows this faith to ascend. It is that which that takes the place of righteous deeds, appending the sinners to the righteous. Of course, it is not just any sinner who benefits from intercession, rather only those who were among the righteous, who aligned themselves with the leaders of goodness and religion, and had a spiritual attraction towards them.

Faith in God comes from and with God, and God cannot descend to Hell and be burned by its fire! The faithful can also not descend to Hell and be burned by its fire. Thus, all the filth

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[419] Qur'an, 25: 70
[420] Qur'an, 35: 10

caused by sin is transformed into blessings and beauty through intercession: *[T]hose shall enter Paradise, therein provided without reckoning.*[421]

Intercession binds the sinning faithful with the truly righteous. It, as an external aid, strengthens the soul and removes all the spiritual obstacles that are present in him. It removes the veil separating the lover and the beloved, a veil caused by the darkness of this realm of multiplicity.

When the human body is attacked by infectious microbes, if strong and possessed of a healthy immune system, it can fend off many illnesses on its own, eliminating the microbe without any external help. But if the body is weak, it may need some medication, some aid to overcome and fight the infection. Similarly, if a person's soul is strong, it can counteract the effects of any sin simply by repenting and being penitent. But if not, the person will need some assistance; he will need some intercession so that his nature can return to its original state, and once again become among the righteous faithful. Hence, we see that although God tells us that intercession functions to reunite the sinners with the righteous, it continuously reminds us that each person is responsible for his own actions, regardless of whether they help or harm him: *[S]tanding to its account is what it has earned, and against its account what it has merited.*[422]

This association is among the things a soul has "earned," meaning the goodly soul of a sinful believer earns him the connection to the souls of the righteous. Pay particular attention to the following verse as it describes how sinful offspring are associated with their righteous ancestors, and how this association is a consequence of those people's deeds: *And those who believed, and their seed followed them in belief, We shall join their seed with them, and We shall not defraud them of aught of their work; every man shall be pledged for what he earned.*[423]

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[421] Qur'an, 40: 40
[422] Qur'an, 2: 286
[423] Qur'an, 52: 21

Children usually follow their fathers in matters of faith but not in their deeds. Yet God states here that a person will also be united with his forefathers in his deeds, while nothing is decreased from his forefathers' deeds to compensate for the lack of the offspring's good deeds. This is what "association" and "binding" means, as the above verse indicates: *Every man shall be pledged for what he earned.* This means that the very act of association is inherently connected to and is the result of the pure nature and belief of that offspring, which in turn is the reason that he would be associated with his forefathers. The descendants of the righteous have themselves earned their own pure intentions and beliefs, and have therefore also earned the transformation of their evil deeds into good.

It should be clear by now how faith and belief connect the lower abode with the higher one and a base person with the exalted, and remove all veils and obstacles that may hinder his spiritual ascent. True faith alone can destroy all those obstacles and be the means by which that person is associated with and appended to the rank of the righteous, and can transform his base actions into righteous deeds. Do we not see how God attests to this when He says, *Those, God will change their evil deeds into good deeds…*?[424]

If there were no established principle that connects a being before and after its transformation, then the process of transformation would be meaningless. If that were the case, it would mean that only the original object remains, while the resulting object would become non-existent. The root principle that connects these two is faith and belief; it is love and *wilāyah.* Therefore, intercession is a specific type of change that occurs in actions, namely, it transforms them. Yet that principal element of the faith and belief remains constant, uniting both sides of the transformation. And this is where we can locate the concept of associating and binding. We see that in the Qur'an, God addresses the Children of Israel who lived during the Prophet's time and associates them with and holds them accountable for

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[424] Qur'an, 25: 70

the actions of their forefathers during the time of Prophet Moses—for example, the following verses: *And when you said, "Moses, we will not believe thee till we see God openly…"*[425] and, *And when you said, "Moses, we will not endure one sort of food…"*

These and many other verses lay out the actions of past Jewish communities and demonstrate that the Jews of the Prophet's time who questioned him believed in and were content with the actions of their forefathers. There is also a narration wherein the narrator asks Imām Riḍā a few questions:

> O son of the Prophet of God! What do you say in response to what is narrated from [Imām] Ṣādiq (peace be upon him), who said, "When our Qāim rises, he will kill the descendants of those who killed al-Ḥusayn through the actions of their forefathers"?
>
> He responded, "It is so. [The truth is as he stated.]"
>
> And I said, "And [what of] God's words, ['No soul laden bears the load of another']? What would it mean?"
>
> He said, "God is truthful in all that He states. But the descendants of al-Ḥusayn's murderers are *content* and pleased with the actions of their forbearers, and take pride in them. And whoever is pleased with an act is as the person who has committed it. So if a man was to be killed in the East, and another in the West was pleased with his death, in God's view, the one pleased would be the killer's accomplice. Indeed, surely the Qā'im will kill them when he rises because of their being pleased and contented with the actions of their forefathers."[426]

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[425] Qur'an, 2: 55

[426] 'Ali ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā, *'Uyūn al-Akhbār*, lithograph ed., chapter 28, p. 178

The Narration of Ibrāhīm al-Laythī

Ibrāhīm al-Laythī went to Imām Bāqir and asked him, "Could a true believer and a man of insight who has attained a high station of *wilāyah*, one who has reached a station of deep spiritual knowledge, commit a cardinal sin?"

The Imām responded: "No, but a sinful believer can suffer a misfortune, meaning at times he may commit a sin, but he will not persist in that sin."

At one point Ibrāhīm stated: "I have seen an individual among your Shī'a who commits all the various types of cardinal sins, and yet neglects to commit any good. Conversely, I have seen among your enemies those who commit all forms of good acts, and who abstain from any evil. However much I reflect on this issue, I cannot seem to resolve this dilemma."

The Imām smiled, and then responded: "What do you think of the beliefs of these two individuals?"

Ibrāhīm said: "If you gave those who are devoted to you the world in gold, or threatened them with a thousand swords, they would not stop their devotion. And your enemies will never tire of your hatred."

The Imām then responded,

> God created all beings from nothing, and not from any prior thing. And among the beings that God created was the land upon which ran a pure and sweet stream of water. And He presented that land with our *wilāyah*, and that land accepted it. And God let that water flow on that land for seven days, until it penetrated all corners of that land, fully saturating it. Then He made that water sink and subside. He then took the most pristine and select clay that emerged wherefrom as clay for the Imāms. And He created our Shī'a from what clay remained. And just as God did not alter our essence and our clay, He has also not altered your essence and clay. Indeed, we and you were one...
>
> Thereafter, God created a land, brackish, putrid, and repugnant, upon which He let flow a salty, bitter, and putrid water. He then presented that land with the Ahl al-Bayt's

wilāyah, and that land rejected it. He let that water flow upon that land for seven days, until that water penetrated and encompassed all corners of that land. Then He made that water sink and subside. And God took from that clay and created the rebellious, the perfidious, and their leaders.

Thereafter, He took the remainder of that clay and mixed it with yours. If He had left that clay as it was, and had not mixed it with yours, they would have never recited the two formulae of the faith (*shahadatayn*), nor would they have ever prayed, fasted, or given charity (*zakāt*) or have made pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) or honored their dues. They would have even looked different from you. Indeed, there is nothing more difficult for a believer than perceiving his enemy's face as resembling his own.

First, God took from the first sweet water and from the second brackish water and mixed the two clays. He then kneaded both of them together, and took a handful, declaring: *This is for Heaven, without any dispute*; then another handful, declaring: *This is for Hell, without dispute*. He then mixed these two handfuls of clay. Thus, the nature of a believer contains within it the nature of a disbeliever. And within the nature of a disbeliever is the nature of a believer.

Thereafter the Imām said,

Whatsoever evil deed you witness one of our Shī'a commit is due to the evil nature of our enemy [that the Shī'a contains within him]; and the act will be derived from the nature of our enemy; and whatsoever good act you witness our enemy commit arises from that pure nature of the believer contained within our enemy, and will be attributed to that good nature. On the Day of Judgment, God will ascribe each action to the source from which it arose: *For I am God: there is no god but I. I know the secret and that which is more hidden. I am aware of the heart of my servants. I act neither tyrannically nor unjustly, and do not make any adhere except to what I knew of him before I created him.*

Then the Imām cited the following verse: *He said, "God forbid that we should take any other but him in whose possession we found the goods; for if we did so, we would be evildoers."*

Then he added,

> The inner reality of this verse is as I stated. As the rays of sun return to it, on the Day of Judgment everything shall return to its origin and to its respective nature. When the Day of Judgment arrives, God will separate and tear off the evil nature of the enemy of the Ahl al-Bayt (*nāṣibs*) from that of the believer, along with all of the burdens and evil that he committed, and will ascribe them to the *nāṣibī* himself. He will also purge and separate the nature and dust of the believer from that of the *nāṣibī* along with all the good deeds and charitable acts he committed, and will ascribe them to the believer. Do you see any injustice or animus in this? By God! This is that Divine adjudication that distinguishes and discerns, that incontrovertible Divine decree and evident justice. God will not be questioned in what He ordains. This is the decree of the higher realms. It is the decree of God and His Messenger. All that I have said is present in the Qur'an.

The Imām then begins to cite the various Qur'anic verses that refer to good actions being attributed to the Shī'a and evil deeds ascribed to the enemies of the Ahl al-Bayt. He cites the following verses: *The unbelievers say to the believers, "Follow our path, and let us carry your offences"; yet they cannot carry anything, even of their own offences; they are truly liars. They shall certainly carry their loads, and other loads along with their loads...*[427] and *That they may bear their loads complete on the Day of Resurrection, and some of the loads of those that they lead astray without any knowledge. O evil the load they bear!*428 and *...[s]ave him who repents, and believes, and does righteous work—those, God will change their evil deeds into*

[427] Qur'an, 29: 12–13
[428] Qur'an, 16: 25

good deeds, for God is ever All-forgiving, All-compassionate.[429]

There are many other verses in the Qur'an that are related to this discussion.[430]

As for traditions that refer to human nature, they do not entail predetermination. That some people are created from a pure clay, and others from a impure one, is not in itself incongruous with the issue of free will. After all, both the pure and the impure substance were created by God to have volition. It is to overcome this objection that the Imām cites the following *ḥadīth qudsī*: "I act neither tyrannically nor unjustly, and do not make any adhere to anything but that which I knew of him before I created him."[431]

Accordingly, divinely ordained culpability corresponds to a person's ability. God only expects a level of perfection that is in line with—and not beyond—what He has bestowed upon His creation. He has not created mankind in a state of compulsion, nor does His knowledge of their actions in any way require them to commit those actions. It is, in reality, the exact opposite of compulsion. He knows mankind's potential for sin through what they commit volitionally, which is decidedly not predetermination. Rather human beings have different levels of potentialities and capabilities, and each person is only expected to attain whatever potentiality he may have. This is the very essence of justice and fairness.

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[429] Qur'an, 25: 70

[430] See for example, *Those who avoid the heinous sins and indecencies, save lesser offences. Surely thy Lord is wide in His forgiveness. Very well He knows you, when He produced you from the earth...*, 53: 32; see also *...therefore hold not yourselves purified; God knows very well him who is godfearing*, 53: 32; *As He originated you so you will return; a part He guided, and a part justly disposed to error—they have taken Satans for friends instead of God...*, 7: 29–30; and *[A]nd think them guided*, 7:30.

[431] *'Ilal al-Sharāyi'*, Section 385. See also *Nawādir al-'ilal*, (Najaf ed.) pp. 606-610.

Without Faith, Righteous Deeds Lack Merit

The previous *ḥadīth*, narrated by Ibrāhīm al-Laythī, does not deny righteous deed or its effects. Rather, it sets certain conditions for these deeds, namely piety, belief in God's oneness, and *wilāyah*. Whatever deed does not contain these three, cannot be classified as righteous, and is not a means of attaining proximity to the Divine. It only appears as a good deed, but is decidedly not so. *God accepts only of the godfearing.*[432]

On the Day of Judgment, all veils of multiplicity will be rent and all particularities will be removed. Spiritual realities will be intermixed and become, finally, one. All heavenly realities will enter Heaven, and all hellish realities will be banished to Hell. The faithful believers will truly join the Immaculate Imāms, and will attain Heaven through these means, whereas the disbelievers and the obstinate will be appended to their leaders and will all be thrown into the Hell-fire.

Qur'anic Verses on the Union of the Righteous (*Luḥūq*)

The Qur'an says the following about Pharaoh: *He shall go before his people on the Day of Resurrection, and will have led them down to the Fire—evil the watering-place to be led down to!*[433] and the following: *...[A]nd the unbelievers will be mustered into Gehenna, that God may distinguish the corrupt from the good, and place the corrupt one upon another, and so heap them up all together, and put them in Gehenna; those are the losers.*[434]

There are also many *aḥādīth* that attest to this union. For example one such tradition states that if you do such-and-such an act, on the Day of Judgment you will be in our company and will hold the same status as we do. This is because of this concept of union (*luḥūq*, joining and *ilḥāq*, being "joined"). Both

[432] Qur'an, 5: 27
[433] Qur'an, 11: 98
[434] Qur'an, 8: 36–37

of these are contingent upon the person's belief and his being a party to *wilāyah*.

A man from among the Helpers (*anṣār*) came to the Prophet and said, "I cannot bear being separated from you. I abandon my family and livelihood to come and see you, all because of this deep love I have for you. What shall I do on the Day of Judgment if they separate me from you?" At that moment, the following verse was revealed: *Whosoever obeys God, and the Messenger—they are with those whom God has blessed, Prophets, just men, martyrs, the righteous; good companions they!*[435]

Traditions about the Centrality of Intention

Many traditions state that the criteria for the goodness or evil of a deed are its intention. A single minor deed when done with good and sincere intention is much more valuable than magnificent deeds with mixed or corrupted intentions. In a *ḥadīth*, the Prophet states: "All deeds are by their intentions. And for each man is what he intends. So whosoever journeys towards God and His Prophet, then his journey is towards God and His Prophet. And whosoever journeys towards the world, while he desires it, or towards a woman that he may marry, his journey will be towards that which he intends."[436] In another narration, Imām Ṣādiq said, "On the Day of Judgment, God will resurrect people according to their intentions."

So at this point, it should be quite clear that an action without intent is quickly effaced and forgotten. All that remains will be the spirit and life of the deed, namely the intention for which the act was first committed. And so, the followers and lovers of the Infallible Imāms and the "friends of God" will all be joined with their leaders because of their sincere and devoted intentions. This is true even when their actions seem insignifi-

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[435] Qur'an, 4: 69
[436] *Munyat al-Murīd*

cant, or if they may have at times stumbled into sin. And intercession will be the force that joins and unites them. Conversely, the reprobates will also be joined with their leaders.

There are many other traditions and narrations that support this conclusion. Here we conclude our discussion with two examples attributed to Imām Bāqir that so eloquently describe the role of intention. He said,

> If you want to know whether there is any good in you, then look into your heart. If you find that you love those who obey God and despise those who disobey Him, then there is good in you and God loves you. If you despise those who obey Him and you love those who disobey Him, then there is evil in you and God despises you. Man is associated with whomever he loves.[437]

The Imām has also stated the following: "By God, if a piece of rock loved us and was devoted to us, God would resurrect him with us. Is religion aught but love?"[438]

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[437] Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, vol. II, pp. 126–27

[438] Shaykh 'Abbās Qomi, *Safinat al-Biḥār*, vol. I, p. 201

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Sixty-Fourth Discourse

The Nature and Reality of Intercession

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *And as for the night, keep vigil a part of it, as a work of supererogation for thee; it may be that thy Lord will raise thee up to a laudable station.*[439]

This verse instructs us to rise in the night, engage in nightly vigil, and read chapters of the Qur'an. God has made this recommended act obligatory upon certain of His servants. And the reward for these acts of devotion will be the station of the status of the Praised One (*maqām al-maḥmūd*). This is the station of universal praise. All of creation praises the individual who holds this station, because such an individual, in turn, benefits all of creation. Indeed, traditions narrated through Sunni and Shī'a scholars indeed agree on this interpretation. Therefore, the station of the praised is the same as the station of the greatest intercession on the Day of Judgment [that is the station of the Prophet]. The act of praise (*ḥamd*) is appreciation and exaltation in response to an intentional and beautiful deed. And yet, *maqām al-maḥmūd* is a type of praise that is unqualified and absolute; all creation must praise [the possessor of such station]. On the Day of Judgment the Prophet does a good deed willingly that benefits all of creation, and in response, all of creation praises and exalts the Prophet. In other words, this *ḥamd* is praise in response to the Prophetic intercession that benefits all creation. It can refer to nothing else. Indeed, this term (*maqām al-maḥmūd*) has a very precise and beautiful meaning, one that is attested to by a number of different traditions and can also be derived from the aforementioned verse.

Imām Ṣādiq was once asked whether a faithful believer also receives this intercession. The Imām responded, "But, of course." Another man asked him, "Does a faithful believer

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[439] Qur'an, 17: 79

need the intercession of the Prophet?" He replied, "Yes. The believers also have sins and mistakes. There is no one but that he will need the intercession of the Prophet on that Day."[440]

In his *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Suyūṭī narrates a tradition from the Prophet when he said, "*Al-Maqām al-maḥmūd* is that intercession."

It must be mentioned that, as prominent scholars like Khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsi, Fāḍil al-Qushjī and Majlisī have noticed, the Prophet has two forms of intercession: one is particular and the other universal. The particular intercession of the Prophet is specific to those who have committed cardinal sins, and thus the Prophetic intercession will exculpate them of these types of sins. This is what the Prophet refers to in this statement: "Indeed, I reserved my intercession for those among my *umma* who have committed grave sins. As for the good, nothing is held against them."

The universal intercession is directed towards all people, allowing for the forgiveness of the sinners, and raising the ranks and stations of the various prophets, divine scholars, righteous warriors, and martyrs in the path of God, and bestowing on all of them increased honors on behalf of God, blessed and exalted is He. Interestingly, both meanings are mentioned in the *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū al-'Abbās al-Mukabbar, when Imām Bāqir responds to Abū al-Ayman: "Woe be upon you! Will he intercede for any other than those upon whom Hell is obligatory?"

This *ḥadīth* is specific to the particular intercession. However, he also stated, "From the first until the last of humankind, there will be none on the Day of Judgment but that he will be in dire need of Muhammad's intercession—peace and blessings of God upon him and his progeny."

Intercession, then, is not reserved simply for sins; it functions as a means of bringing a soul ever nearer to the Divine, raising a person's spiritual station, and facilitating his journey towards God. And yet, its main prerequisite is solid faith and proper belief. This individual must be both Muslim and

[440] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. XIII, pp. 191

mu'min,[441] and he must not rebel against God, either through rejection or insolence. This person may be drenched in sin, covered by the dust and dirt of all he has done, but that inner belief and faith must still remain strong and intact. It is through intercession that the filth that has gathered will be wiped away, and the pure soul and its righteous belief can once again shine through, guiding him to that source of Divine protection and succor. Hence, Imām Riḍā stated, "None receive that intercession except those whose devotion God is pleased with."

Imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim also narrates a *ḥadīth* from his forefathers, reaching back to the Prophet, who said, "Indeed, my intercession is for those among my *umma* who have committed grave sins. As for the good, nothing is held against them."

He was asked how it is that the Prophet's intercession is reserved for those who have committed grave sins, when God states, *[T]hey intercede not save for him with whom He is well-pleased.*[442] God is surely not well-pleased with those who have committed these grave sins.

The Imām responded, "Any and all believers who commit a sin loathe their deed and regret having committed it. The Prophet said, 'Regret is sufficient for penitence'. He has also stated, 'Whosoever is delighted by good and is repelled by evil is a faithful believer.'"

Then they asked him, "O son of the Prophet! How could it be that a person who does not regret an evil deed he committed is therefore not a faithful believer?"

The Imām answered,

> There is no one who commits a cardinal sin, and knowing that he will be punished for it, is not regretful of his deed. And if he regrets his deed, he begins to repent, becoming worthy, thereupon, of intercession. Until he repents, he persists in committing evil, and a person who persists in such a way will not be forgiven, because he does not truly believe in the otherworldly consequences of his deed. If he believed in those consequences, he would surely regret it. The

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[441] For the Qur'an's definition of *mu'min*, see 4: 136 and 2: 285.

[442] Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Āmālī*, p. 5

> Prophet said, "With penitence, no such thing as cardinal sins remains; and with insistence, no such thing as 'minor' sins exists." As for God's words (*[T]hey intercede not save for him with whom He is well-pleased*), what is intended here is that they will not intercede for anyone whose devotion God does not approve of. Devotion, in this case, is a bearing witness to the reward of good deeds and to the consequences of evil deeds. Then, whoever's religion God is pleased with, that person, because of his cognizance of the consequences of his actions on the Day of Judgment, will be regretful and penitent for the evil he committed.[443]

From what has thus far been stated about intercession, we can conclude the following: that intercession is generally accepted, albeit not unconditionally and absolutely. As we mentioned before, intercession is in reality the mediation between a cause and an effect. And there are no absolutes in causality. If causality were unrestricted, then all causes would lead to all effects, making causality meaningless and void.

This is one of the dimensions about which we can safely say that those who reject intercession have entirely misunderstood what it really means. They think that intercession is unrestricted and universal. They have constructed their criticism on the basis of this misunderstanding, without really reflecting on the Qur'an's meanings. Thus, they engage in critique with little thought, unwittingly denying these Qur'anic realities and God's intent behind His words.[444]

On a Rational Proof for the Intercession of Weak Souls by Perfected Souls on the Day of Judgment

Before a person commits a deed, a state of goodness or evil, felicity or wretchedness, enters his soul, a state that results from each of his previous actions. This means that he will either move closer to his own human nature, or he will move

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[443] Shaykh Ṣadūq , *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, chapter 63, pp. 407–8
[444] For further detailed discussion of this issue see, Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*. See also *Ma'ād Shenāsī*, vol. 9, page 344–65.

away from it. The more good or bad acts are committed, the more those acts becomes engendered and ingrained in the person's soul, becoming ever more a part of its disposition. It is through this ingrained disposition that a person attains a good or an evil nature. The reoccurrence of good or evil deeds creates a fixed nature in the soul that can be good or evil in such a way that from it emanate all deeds. If such a nature is good, all its effects will correspond with it; and if that nature is wretched, all deeds emanating from that would be destructive. Such a nature, in a final analysis, would be entirely evil.

Therefore, a good-natured person is enthralled by his actions both because of his being human, and because he has realized the potential goodness within. An evil-natured person has certain degree of intimacy with and fondness for the effects of his soul because he is the source and cause of those actions; yet insofar as he is also human, those actions cause him great distress and pain. This is true for consummate souls, regardless of whether their deeds are good or evil. In other words, a person whose nature is good essentially also produces good acts, and a soul that is essentially evil produces evil acts.

The un-consummate souls are also of two types. They can be essentially good, but evil only in terms of deeds; that is, their nature is good and steadfast in faith, but they are corrupted through the occurrences of certain evil accidents in them—hence they commit sins and evil deeds because of their attachment to a material body. Because of this attachment to the material world, their souls suffer from the darkness of multiplicity, and the effects of this multiplicity become ever more manifest in them. Yet, all of this apparent corruption is in fact compelled, and is incompatible with a good nature. Insofar as it is compelled, they are ephemeral, for there is proof that compelled acts do not last. Therefore, these righteous, good-natured, and believing souls will be purified in accordance with the amount of corruption that has infected their souls. That purification will occur through certain trials and difficulties either in this world, in the intermediate purgatorial realm, or on the Day of Resurrection.

The second category of un-consummate souls includes those that are wretched in essence but good in deed. All those good deeds, and their obedience to and worship of God, all are compelled states that have descended upon them. This apparent state of their soul is also fleeting and will be removed, either slowly and painstakingly, or quickly, and that evil nature will once again emerge in its true form.

As for souls that are neither wholly good nor entirely evil, these souls have yet to become actualized. When these souls are separated from their bodies, they are still deficient and weak. These souls await God's decree. They *are deferred to God's commandment, whether He chastises them, or turns towards them; God is All-knowing, All-wise.*[445]

This entire discussion is related in its very essence, on the one hand, to the argument for rewards and punishment as recompense—in reality, the consequence and result—of good and evil actions. After all, any contingent and relative relation must return to a real and existential one. On the other hand, there is proof that varying degrees of perfection depend on the strength or weakness and the perfection or imperfection of the soul. This is derived from that principle of gradation (*tashkīk*), and is particularly so when it is related to the realm of "pure" light (*nūr-i mujarrad*). Therefore, we can state that each soul is at a different level in its journey of ascension and return to its origin. Each one is either closer or farther away from that root and the ultimate source of perfection; some are at a higher level of perfection, while others are lower. This is a characteristic of the active causes and mediating emanations that arise from the Supreme Truth, blessed and Most High is He. Therefore, the function of intercession that allows for the removal of evil, lowly, and wretched states from the souls of the weak is bestowed upon the perfected souls, like those of the prophets and friends of God, and in particular the Prophet's soul, who attained the highest level of perfection and actualization. The same rule applies to those souls that are hierarchically lower than the above group and are among the saved ones but that

[445] Qur'an, 9: 106

committed evil deeds under force or duress. Intercession will be extended to them as well. This is the true meaning of the particular intercession (*shifā'at khāṣṣah*) on the Day of Judgment; it is extended to those who commit cardinal sins and yet are still good, as proved through the rational proof. *And All praise is to God alone.*

Intercession does not Condone or Encourage Sin in the Islamic *Umma*

Some observers see intercession in terms of its societal repercussions, as a doctrine that leads people to commit sin and deviate from the right path. They claim that when people believe their sins will be ultimately forgiven, they tend to take legal injunctions and religious commandments lightly, and are more likely to transgress. These critics argue in similar ways against Christians, who believe that Prophet Jesus accepted crucifixion as a sacrifice for the sins of his community. They lay the blame for the supposedly high rates of sinfulness even among pious and believing Christians at the door of intercession. Because of this critique, many Islamic scholars try to interpret the hermeneutic meaning of intercession, and instead understand it as a form of existential mediation in the engendered realm, or of his pronouncing and implementing particular sacred laws, or even as his proclaiming the prophetic message and the guiding of people towards perfection. In effect, they try to muddle the entire discussion.

First, Islam has not presented intercession in the way this group has described, nor does the intercession Islam presents have these pitfalls. Intercession is a means for the faithful believers to not suffer in Perdition eternally, with the stipulation that God must be pleased with that individual's belief and faith. At the same time, it states that a person's very faith is in grave danger when he sins—in particular when he commits those cardinal sins. That individual's persistence in committing that sin will cause the destruction of that person's faith, in turn leading to his eternal damnation. With such a description, a sinful person could not consider himself as among those who will be

saved. Rather it forces him into a state of uncertainty, as he oscillates between fear [of Divine punishment] and hope [of Divine succor].

On the other hand, Islamic laws that pertain to society are legislated in such a way that they encompass all individual and societal actions that a person may commit. For example, take the rules on compensation, on judgments and penance, on blood-money (*diyah*) and criminal punishments, and others. By legislating the principle of commanding the good and forbidding evil (*amr bi'l ma'rūf wa nahy 'an al-munkar*), it makes individuals in society pay attention to and contend with one another in doing good. Through belief in the two presiding angels who record and preserve all of a person's actions, it has effectively reined man in, and has stopped him from both extreme zealousness and extreme impiety. Islam has indeed encouraged the individual to orient himself—both inwardly and outwardly—towards the straight path, whether it be in terms of his knowledge, actions, or beliefs. It really enlivens the person, and gives him hope by inculcating a deep understanding of the origins and final ends of his life, of the various stages of his afterlife, and of the existence and nature of his soul. There are indeed many who have found salvation simply because they have continuously hoped and aspired to find the truth.

Second, Islam confines intercession to the Day of Judgment, as a means of saving a soul from eternal damnation. It does not apply to any of the other processes of punishment experienced after death; all the other worldly and otherworldly forms and processes of punishment, from the difficult stages right before death, to the intermediary world (*barzakh*), to the grave and all its various stages of punishment, will still be in place for the sinner, along with the potential to enter into the Hell-fire on the Day of Judgment.

Are all these promises insufficient in preventing a believer from committing sins? Can that source of eternal mercy and compassion, that Divine love and the attraction of that Divine fragrance, really not draw someone towards God's sanctuary? Can it really not burn all those mounds of sin by their very roots

and causes, within the person's soul? Should fear alone be the only means of prevention against sin?

Third, intercession actually leads to a decrease in sin, not an increase. This entire notion that Christians are more prone to sinning than other peoples is entirely baseless. Indeed, statistics do not bear this out. Rather it seems sinfulness is more prominent among Jews, among whom aggression and laxity is much more prevalent. Christians are in fact much more prone to compassion and kindness, which is a direct result of their belief in the sacrifice of Prophet Jesus, even if it may be incorrect. The Qur'an describes the polytheists and impious Jews as having "hard" hearts and a profound enmity towards the faithful-believers—while at the same time, it describes Christians as merciful and compassionate, and as being much closer to the faithful believers. It was this very sense of love and compassion, a message that is fundamentally compatible with the human primordial nature (*fiṭrah*), that allowed Christianity to spread so quickly. This is why we see so many of the adherents of this religion doing such compassionate deeds, like nursing the leprous, and placing themselves in such difficulties, all to protect the legacy of that source of Divine mercy. If on occasions we witness some merciless acts by Christians, it is because they have fallen away from the true dictates and orders of their *Sharī'ah*. This is equally true for Muslims, who as a result of their forgoing the dictates of their Sharī'ah—and not abiding by their respective faiths—fall into sin and callousness.

We clearly see that this form of compassion and mercy is greater among the Shī'a because their leaders were, and still are, each an axis of compassion and mercy, of devotion to the Divine, and of the Divine's manifestations. Simply by invoking the name of Imām Ḥusayn—who sacrificed his entire being for the revival of his grandfather's religion and his father's path—tumultuous anger and enmity is calmed, and rivers of love and leniency pour down upon Shī'ī society and all the various relationships therein. Is this not one of the real effects of intercession? This clear and visible intercession has a deeper reality in the higher spiritual realms. It is there that the true

meaning of this intercession will emerge, and will expunge all those sins a person has committed.

The Occasion of Intercession

The question to raise here is when this intercession, which is supposed to deter Divine punishment, will take place. In the 63rd discourse, we discussed the following verse: *Every soul shall be pledged for what it has earned...*[446] In other words, all souls must account for their deeds, except the People of the Right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*) who will ask the sinners, *What thrusted you into Sakar? They shall say, "We were not of those who prayed, and we fed not the needy, and we plunged along with the plungers, and we cried lies to the Day of Doom, till the Certain came to us." Then the intercession of the intercessors shall not profit them.*[447]

In addition to all other explanations we presented before, it is important to note here that the verse indicates that the "intercession" of the intercessors only benefits a person in freeing him from the binds of the Day of Judgment, and of eternal punishment in the Hell-fire. All other forms and stations of the Day of Judgment and their respective types of punishment will remain intact. There is no reason to believe that intercession also occurs during those stages. One can even say that these verses specifically indicate that intercession liberates a soul from the Hell-fire, and nothing else.

In his commentary 'Ali ibn Ibrāhīm records a narration from Imām Ṣādiq on verse 100 in chapter 23 of the Qur'an, where God says, *and there; behind them, is a barrier until the day that they shall be raised up.*[448] Imām Ṣādiq commented on this verse and said, "By God, I do not fear for you except when it comes to the *barzakh*. As for when we have the command, then we have authority over you." This comment of the Imām

[446] Qur'an, 74: 38
[447] Qur'an, 74: 40–46
[448] Qur'an, 23: 100

makes it clear that intercession takes place only on the Day of Judgment and not in that intermediary stage.

In addition, there are also traditions that indicate the Prophet and the Ahl al-Bayt will appear at the deathbed of a believer, and even when he is interred in the grave, and will aid him through the difficulties of those stages of death. This type of support is not actually intercession. Rather it is among the divinely permitted ways by which the Prophet and Imāms intervene and preside over all of existence, ways that God has bestowed as a favor upon them. We will, God willing, discuss this issue soon in a discourse on the A'rāf. In a sense, we can look at this phenomenon through some of the verses of the Qur'an: *On the day when We shall call all men with their record, and whoso is given his book in his right hand—those shall read their book, and they shall not be wronged a single date-thread. And whosoever is blind in this world shall be blind in the world to come, and he shall be even further astray from the way.*[449]

This means that the Imām intervenes, in terms of how the scroll of deeds is delivered and how it is read. This intervention of the Imām is a form of divinely bestowed authority over those individuals.

We can gather from all the aforementioned discussions that intercession really is dedicated to that final juncture in the vast stages of the Day of Judgment. It necessarily entails either Divine forgiveness, or preventing a soul from being cast into the Hell-fire. Or the intercessor can manifest certain Divine favors towards a soul that has already been flung into Hell, and by extending God's mercy, remove him. This concept of intercession is a necessary and established point of the doctrine, such that Imām Ṣādiq states,

> Whoever denies the truth of three things is not one of our Shī'a: the heavenly ascension of the Prophet (*mi'rāj*), the questioning in the grave (*al-musalata'*), and intercession.

[449] Qur'an, 17: 71

The insatiable Hell-fire, that red heat,
I know five who can and will quench it,
They are al-Muṣṭafā and al-Murtaḍā,
And their two sons and al-Fāṭimah.

*   *   *

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Sixty-Fifth Discourse

The Pulpit as the Banner of Praise [*Ḥamd*]

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *By the white forenoon and the brooding night! Thy Lord has neither forsaken thee nor hates thee and the Last shall be better for thee than the First. Thy Lord shall give thee, and thou shalt be satisfied.*[450]

In his exegesis on this verse, Sultan Muhammad Janābudī, the author of *Bayān al-Sa'ādah*, states that the verse in fact means God will shower man with such blessings that he will attain the status of contentment (*riḍā*) and will be content with these blessings. That is the reason the station of him upon whom blessings are bestowed is understood to be the "Greater Intercession." According to numerous traditions like the one narrated from Imām Ṣādiq, this is the most hope-inspiring verse in the entire Qur'an: "The contentment of my Grandfather—may Allāh's peace and blessings be upon him and his progeny—is for there not to be any monotheists in Hell."[451]

This is how expansive the Prophet's soul was, a soul with such abounding mercy that it encompasses all prophets, righteous servants, and pious martyrs, and all those who are true and sincere throughout the world. All communities are in dire need of his spiritual emanations. And any who derive benefit from him will in turn praise him, for he is the "Praised One."

Bishr ibn Shurayḥ al-Baṣrī states that he once asked Imām Bāqir which verse in the Qur'an is the most hope-inspiring.

The Imām responded, "What do your people think?"

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[450] Qur'an, 93: 1–5

[451] Sultan Muhammad Janābudī, *Bayān al-Sa'ādah*, lithograph edition, vol. II, p. 316

> I said, "The people believe this verse is such: *O my people who have been prodigal against yourselves, do not despair of God's mercy.*"[452]
>
> The Imām said, "We, the Ahl al-Bayt, do not cite this verse. Rather, it is the following verse we believe is the most hope-inspiring verse because it is about intersession, by God, it is intercession! By God, it is intercession! *Thy Lord shall give thee, and thou shalt be satisfied.*"[453]

Let us explore why the Imām cites this as the most hope-inspiring verse of the Qur'an, and not others. Take for example the following verse: *do not despair of God's mercy…*,[454] which generally forbids despair from God's legislative mercy because it says *have been prodigal against yourselves*. Why is this not the most sanguine? God, after all, is here broadening His forgiveness to include all sins, without exception. Let us examine this verse in full: *Say: "O my people who have been prodigal against yourselves, do not despair of God's mercy; surely God forgives sins altogether; surely He is the All-forgiving, the All-compassionate. Turn unto your Lord and surrender to Him, ere the chastisement comes upon you, then you will not be helped. And follow the fairest of what has been sent down to you from your Lord, ere the chastisement comes upon you suddenly while you are unaware."*[455]

Having proscribed any despair in God's mercy, and ensuring Divine forgiveness for all sins, the verse calls its audience to penitence, to surrender to the Divine Will, and to commit righteous deeds. In reality, the verse is saying that all those who are prodigal against themselves, and commit sins, must not despair in God's mercy so long as they are able to repent, submit, and do good deeds. This verse is not unqualified (*muṭlaq*). It is qualified with penitence, submission (*islām*), and abidance to good deeds. These means allow them to arrange for their

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452 Qur'an, 39: 53
453 Qur'an, 93 :5
454 Qur'an, 39: 53
455 Qur'an, 39: 53–55

own forgiveness. However, in the verse *Thy Lord shall give thee, and thou shalt be satisfied,*[456] this contentment is a universal and unqualified form of mercy that God bestowed upon the Prophet, that source of mercy for all the worlds, in an unqualified and unconditional manner—a promise that delighted the Prophet's soul, bringing him both tranquility and serenity, and a Divine oath of gratitude, unprecedented for any save the Prophet of Islam. Here, both the Divine dispensation and the Prophetic contentment are unqualified. However, there are other cases of unqualified Divine dispensations that God bestows upon a select few among his worshipers. For example, see the verse *Whatsoever they will they shall have with their Lord...*[457] As well, the verse *Therein they shall have whatever they will...*[458]

This final verse indicates that God has created certain favors for those who shall reside in Heaven, things that are beyond their farthest hopes and dreams. These are things they could not even imagine, not to mention hope or dream. In other words: *No soul knows what comfort is laid up for them secretly...*[459] If God bestows upon the believing faithful things that are beyond their comprehension, He must grant the Prophet—particularly at that station of gratitude—things that are even greater and more profound. This is the dispensation of the Real-True God, Majestic and Glorious is He. As for that state of Prophetic contentment, it is, in reality, in response to that Divine dispensation—meaning he is content with all that God has commanded and decreed, a contentment that is neither more nor less than the command and decree itself. Therefore the Prophetic contentment must be beyond any and all limits and bounds. Interestingly, we have the same type of unqualified contentment in relation to the faithful believers who have done righteous deeds that *God is well-pleased with them, and*

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[456] Qur'an, 93 :5
[457] Qur'an, 42: 22
[458] Qur'an, 50: 35
[459] Qur'an, 32: 17

they are well-pleased with Him...[460] With this, and God's statement regarding the Prophet's being *gentle to the believers, compassionate,*[461] we can see how the Prophet's station of "special gratitude" is without doubt greater and more expansive than even that of the faithful believers.

After we have described this degree of the Prophet's gentleness and compassion towards the believers, how can anyone suppose that such a gracious and noble Prophet would be content with residing in Heaven, surrounded by all those heavenly and eternal blessings, while some of the faithful believers remain shackled in the burning pits of Hell—believers who have attested to the Oneness of God and have confirmed his prophecy, and yet have simultaneously defiled their own souls and committed sins, not because they rebelled, or spited or denied God's command, but rather because they were overcome by their ignorance, their carnal soul, and the guile of the Devil.

The Day of Judgment will be the Day when this true Divine gentleness and compassion will manifest itself through the Prophet. The sinful believer who has seen the fruits of his actions throughout his journey in this world and the Hereafter, and in the throes of death and the *barzakh,* will witness the consequences of his actions in all the stages of the Day of Judgment; what could that "unqualified contentment" be referring to other than that Great Intercession for the believers?

Mufaḍḍal ibn 'Umar states,

> I heard Imām Ṣādiq say the following in relation to the verse, *And the earth shall shine with the light of its Lord...*[462]
>
> "The lord of the Earth refers to the Imām of the Earth."
>
> I said, "What happens when it exits?"

[460] Qur'an, 98: 8
[461] Qur'an, 9: 128
[462] Qur'an, 39: 69

He said, "It is when the people become independent of the sun's rays and the moon's light, and will become sufficed with the light of the Imām."[463]

The Prophet of God once said, "Whenever you pray to God for a thing, always appeal to God to bestow the *wasīlah* upon me." They then asked the Prophet, "What is the *wasīlah*?" The Prophet replied,

> The *wasīlah* is my status in Heaven, which is above a thousand steps—each step is created from a ruby (*yaqūt*) or a particular gem and the next row of steps is made of chrysolith (*zibarjad*). Above that is another row of steps made of pearl (*low'low'*) and another made of gold and silver. On the Day of Judgment, it, along with the ranks of all the other prophets, will be placed in a station. And my station will shine above all others like the moon outshines all stars in the clear skies of a dark night. And all the prophets, all those who are true and right, along with all martyrs, will say, "Blessed is he who has such a station and pulpit!" Then, at this very moment, it will be announced, "This is the rank of Muhammad."

The Prophet then said,

> I will arrive, then, donning a garment of light and a crown of mastery and nobility on my head. 'Ali will be carrying my banner, the banner of "Praise" (*lawā' al-ḥamd*) before me, upon which is inscribed *lā ilāha illa-Llāh Muhammad rasūl Allāh al-Mufliḥūn hum al-Fā 'izūn bi-Llāh* ("There is no god but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God, the Felicitous are those who will triumph by Allāh"). As we pass by the prophets, they will all say, "These two are angels that we have hitherto not seen and that we do not recognize." And we will pass by the angels, and they will say, "These two are prophets that we have hitherto not seen."

[463] As quoted in 'Ali ibn Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr*, lithograph edition, p. 581

I will climb up on the *wasīlah*, and 'Ali will follow. I will attain my high rank and 'Ali will attain a rank just below mine, as he bears my banner. All the prophets and faithful believers will raise their heads towards us, saying, "Blessed are these two servants (of God). How lofty is their station in the eyes of God." It will then be announced, "This is my beloved, Muhammad, and this is my *walī*, 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib. Blessed is he who loves them, and woe upon him who despises them, and who ascribes falsehoods upon them."

Turning towards Imām 'Ali, the Prophet continued,

O 'Ali, on that day, all who love you will become tranquil and calm by these words. Their faces will illuminate and their hearts will become joyous. And all who despised you, who fought with you, or who denied what was your right, will on that day be ignominious and they will tremble. At this moment, two angels will draw towards me: one will be Riḍwān, the gatekeeper of Heaven, and the other, the gatekeeper of Hell. Riḍwān, the gatekeeper of Heaven, will come forward and say, "Peace be upon you, O Messenger of God!" I will respond to him, saying, "Who are you, O elegant and pleasant angel, one exalted by your Lord?" He will respond, "It is I, Riḍwān, the gatekeeper of Heaven. My Lord has commanded me to hand you the keys to Heaven, and here I have brought them. Take them, O Muhammad!" I will say, "I have accepted this gift from my Lord. All praise and thanks are due to Him for this blessing He has bestowed upon me. Leave them with my brother, 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib." And having relinquished the keys, he shall depart. Then, the gatekeeper of Hell will come forward, and will give his greetings and say, "Peace be upon you, O Beloved of God!" I will greet him in return, saying, "Who are you, O hideous and unsightly angel?" He will respond, "It is I, the gatekeeper of Hell. My Lord has commanded me to hand you the keys to Hell, and here I have brought them. Take them, O Muhammad!" After praising God, I will tell him to hand the keys over to 'Ali, and having handed them, he will also depart. At this point, 'Ali, possessing all the keys of Heaven and Hell, will come to sit on the back of Hell, and take hold of its reins. All the while, flames and

> screams will rise from the pits of Hell, while it burns at its highest heat, and its sparks fly forth. Hell will call out, "O 'Ali, leave me quickly. For your light is drowning out my fuel and flames." 'Ali will command Hell, "O Hell, let this man be; he is my companion; and take this man, for this is my enemy." Hell will, on that day, be more obedient than any servant to his master. On that Day, the reins of Hell will be in the hands of 'Ali. He can make it go whichever way he wills. Hell will be more obedient to 'Ali than all of creation. And that is because 'Ali will, thereon, separate the Gardens from the Fire (*Qasīm al-nār wa'l jannah*).[464]

The following *ḥadīth* is also narrated from the Prophet, who said,

> Jibra'īl came to me and said, "Shall I announce to you the means by which you will traverse the Path (*Ṣirāṭ*)?" I said, "But, of course!" He said, "You will traverse it with the light of God, and 'Ali will traverse it with your light, while your light is from God's light. And your *umma* will traverse it with 'Ali's light, while 'Ali's light is from your light. He whom God did not give 'Ali's light, he will have no light."[465]

Indeed many traditions describe the *wasīlah* as a pulpit in Heaven, designating it for the Messenger of God, the Commander of the Faithful, and the Imāms. Just as many traditions state that the Banner of Divine Praise will be carried by the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali, there are other *aḥādīth*, among them the following from Imām Riḍā, who narrates from his forefathers on the authority of Imām 'Ali, that the Prophet once stated, "O 'Ali, you are the first (person) to enter Paradise, all while you will be carrying my banner. It is the Banner of Praise, a banner with 70 pieces, with each piece being larger than the sun and the moon."[466]

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[464] The original text is available in Qomi, *Tafsīr*, pp. 644–45, as quoted in Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. VII, pp. 326–27.
[465] *Tafsīr Furāt*, Beirut edition, p. 287, Najaf edition, pp. 104–5
[466] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. VIII, p. 4

What can be gathered from the various narrations is that on the Day of Judgment, the Prophet will be seen as possessing the *wasīlah* and the Banner of Praise. This *wasīlah* is a type of pulpit that has a thousand steps. The Prophet of God will ascend these steps and will take his place on that thousandth step, and the Commander of the Faithful will take his place one step below him. This pulpit will be facing the Divine Throne. Each of the other prophets, along with all the righteous believers (*Ṣāliḥīn*), the true and sincere believers (*Siddiqīn*), and all the martyrs, will all take their appropriate place on one of the steps. All other people, from the various levels of believers from the first until the final creatures of God, will sit at the foot of the pulpit, in that place called *'araṣāt*, which is an expansive land. All will gather round the pulpit and all will be gazing towards the Prophet. All the prophets, who will be seated at various points on the *wasīlah*, will enjoy their own particular station. And yet, they will all turn their eyes upward, and gaze upon the Prophet of God. His light and the light of his direct legatee, who bears his Banner of the Unicity of God (*tawḥīd*), will be so strong and brilliant, so engrossing and yet so beautiful and tranquil, that all the prophets and true and sincere believers will be drawn towards it.

At this point, Gabriel, the most proximate of all the heavenly angels, will come to the Prophet bearing the Banner of Praise, and will hand it to the Prophet of God. The Prophet will then hand it to the Commander of the Faithful ('Ali), who will be standing on a step adjacent to that of the Prophet. This banner is called the Banner of Praise (*Lawa'-i ḥamd*). Its flagstaff will be of pure silver; on each of its three fringes, it states, *In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful; all praise is due to God, the Lord of the Worlds, and there is no deity but God, Muhammad is his Prophet.*

Now let us examine the symbolism of the *wasīlah* and the meaning of all symbols discussed above.

A *wasīlah* refers to a means that helps a person reach his desired end. Its thousand steps may symbolize the thousand veils that separate the soul from the state of absolute knowledge of God (*ma'rifah*); or it could actually suggest the

thousand Divine Names. The Prophet has uncovered all of the veils that separated him from God, and has stood by that final veil, called the most intimate veil (*ḥijāb aqrab*), which is the final and only border between himself and the Divine Essence, a divider where no other exists. He, at this station, is entirely given to and immersed in this Name, and is annihilated (*fānī*) in it. He has become fully realized in that Name as he has become fully annihilated in the Greatest Name of the Divine Unitary Essence, which is that same station of Absolute servanthood to God that is the station of complete Divine authority (*wilāyah*). All other prophets, in terms of station and rank, are beneath the Prophet and the Commander of the Faithful. Each of these prophets has annihilated himself in a particular Divine Name, and is therefore situated on the step that corresponds to that Name. As the steps ascend, each higher step corresponds to a reality more universal and expansive. Thus, whoever has been annihilated in a more universal Name will ascend a higher step, until those final steps, which correspond to the Names the Omniscient (al-'Alīm), the Omnipotent (al-Qadīr), Omnipresent (al-Ḥayy), and Allāh. The last Name in fact is the most perfect and universal of all Names, as it embodies them all and is the root and origin of all other names of God.

Therefore, we can envision this as a conical pulpit: at its first step—its base—is gathered much of creation, many of the prophets, and the truthful believers and the martyrs; higher levels have less capacity and yet more power, magnificence, and life, and will therefore contain fewer people. As we ascend this pulpit step by step, the level of power, knowledge, and life intensifies, until we arrive upon the final step, which will only bear the Prophet of God. That apex is composed of a single point, that "single point between the two arches of unicity and oneness" (*nuqṭa al-wāḥidah bayn qaws al-Aḥadīyah wa al-Wāḥidīyah*).

This station is also the source and focal point of power, knowledge, and life. It emanates these universal Divine Names to the rest of the cone, in other words, to the rest of the heavens and the earth, the Kingdom (*mulk*) and the Dominion (*malakūt*). It is this apex and pinnacle that is called the station of

ghayb al-ghuyūb (the most hidden secret), *kanz-i makhfī* (the Hidden Treasure), *'Ālam-i 'amā'* (the Blind World), the secret of the Divine Ipseity (*sirr huwīyah*), and the fullest realization of the name *hū*. This station is indeed the source of *wilāyah* and the locus of its manifestation (*ẓuhūr*).

One level below this is the first point at which the Names become manifested in the world of creation. It is the realm of complete Divine *wilāyah*. That is the hallowed station of the Commander of the Faithful—that Master of all masters who is sustained by the Divine Essence through the intermediation of the Prophet of God, and who emanates those realities into the realms of the Kingdom (*mulk*) and the Dominion. (*malakūt*). Thus, 'Ali is the first locus of manifestation of *wilāyah*, an intermediary between the inward and the outward, and from that station it emanates to all prophets and friends of God.

The Prophet's being can be likened to the main lens of a telescope, which reflects all those heavenly lights and forms onto another lens, or that which manifests all those images. 'Ali is indeed a manifestation of the Prophet of God; the Prophet is the inward, and he is the outward. The Commander of the Faithful, who stands one level below the Prophet, absorbs the reality of knowledge, life, and power from that intermediate station (*maḥall-i bayn al-bayn*) between the Divine Essence and the Divine Name, in other words, the station of the Prophet. Therefore, Imām 'Ali is the first locus of manifestation for Divine *wilāyah*, a locus that exists between the inward and outward realities. This *wilāyah* then emanates forth from him unto all the prophets and Friends of God—one step at a time—until it arrives upon the lowest levels of the *wasīlah* and falls upon all creatures who have gathered around that pulpit. It even reaches all those who suffer the trials of Hell, those who have not even attained this *wasīlah*.

The nobility and exceptional status of the Seal of the Prophets and his legatee, vicegerent, and successor, is neither titular nor ceremonial. It is through an existential expansion, the proximity of their essences, the undoing of those veils of light, and traversing through all the (Divine) Names and Attributes, attained through great struggles and ascetic practice.

In the 53rd discourse, we discussed the Path (*Ṣirāṭ*) and the Scale (*mīzān*) and mentioned that these two terms are not simply metaphorical or analogical, nor do they denote the same meaning that they do in this world, nor are they an example of explaining the intelligible (*ma'qūlāt*) through the sensible (*maḥsūsāt*). Rather, there really *is* a bridge and a scale that correspond to that realm, a realm of true realities, which are denuded of all attachments and material forms. That discussion is also relevant here with the *wasīlah*, the pulpit, the banner, and the flag of the Prophet, along with what the *ḥadīth* that describes Imām 'Ali riding on the top of Hell, while he holds onto its reins, steering it from right to left. This is also mentioned in the Qur'an: *and Hell is brought near that day; on the day man will remember.*[467]

There is no doubt that Hell will be brought forth, and its reins will be in the hands of Imām 'Ali. Now, does this description of Hell mean that Hell is like all the riding animals of our world, say a horse or a camel? And is its rein and bit like the reins and bits of this realm? Of course not! Rather all these things correspond to that realm, because after all, that realm differs from our world. That is a realm of the Invisible; here is a realm of witnessing. There, only the inward exists, and here, only the outward exists. And all beings and all rulings correspond to the reality of that realm. Therefore, when we speak of intercession, and state that the various groups of people will go to the prophets on the Day of Judgment and ask them for intermediation, the prophets will say that it is beyond their authority.

Then all these people will turn to the Prophet of Islam and will seek intercession from him. He will go to the Abode of the Compassionate, which is the (Heavenly) Gardens. Its gate is as long as the distance between the East and the West. He will move the door pull, and it will be said—although the person will know him well—"Who is this?" He will respond, "I am Muhammad." It will be said, "Open the gates for him." And he said, "And the gates will open for me."

[467] Qur'an, 89: 23

He said, "When I gaze upon my Lord, I will glorify him in a way in which none before me will have glorified Him, nor will any after me..." until he states, "Then our Lord will sit upon His throne."[468]

There is no doubt that there are many realities hidden in this *ḥadīth*, secrets that can be discovered. However, the question is, can the apparent meaning of the words in this *ḥadīth* be understood as they appear? Can we really interpret the "Abode of the Compassionate" as just a bigger version of the houses of this world we live in? And the "door pull"? And that "God is 'in' the house, and He asks, 'Who is it?'" And that the Prophet will "gaze upon Him" and will sit upon the Divine throne, and many other such otherworldly realities that are at times described in this way? Do all of these have physical explanations? Are they all taken at face-value?

Of course this is not the case. This would necessitate a delimiting and a binding of God, a form of anthropomorphization. *And God is greatly exalted beyond all that the unjust say of Him.*[469] God is not contained within a house, nor is His throne like the thrones of this world. Indeed His throne is actually the entire realm of His Will and desire. And his sitting on His throne is His complete encompassing and dominance. The Prophet's gaze is spiritual and inward, a gaze onto Him who has no name nor image. The "door pull" is a metaphor for the Prophet's grasping onto God's compassion and His mercy and forgiveness. For God has many names, and each one of those is like a ring that one can grasp: whichever of these rings a person grasps, he will be activating and benefiting from that attribute. *Say: "Call upon God, or call upon the Merciful; whichsoever you call upon, to Him belong the Names Most Beautiful."*[470]

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[468] This narration is recorded in 'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*. vol. II, pp. 310–13, and also narrated in Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Hurūfi ed. vol. VIII, pp. 45–47.
[469] Qur'an, 17: 43
[470] Qur'an, 37: 159–60

This refusal to concretize and dogmatic insistence on the superficial outward meaning of terms and statements (*jamūd bar ma'anī-yi ẓāhirīyahh*) does not just apply to the Divine Essence or Names. Rather it applies to all fields of religious sciences. First, the terms used in these various fields of religious knowledge are coined for universal concepts and issues (*ma'ānī-yi kullīyah*). Second, there is a specific *ḥadīth* narrated from the Prophet that states: "We, the Prophets, have been commanded to speak to people in accordance with the level of their intellects."[471]

As we can conclude from this *ḥadīth*, on the one hand, we must not understand these terms on the basis of their literal meanings and should not apply them to the fields of Divine knowledge, and on the other, we cannot simply interpret them purely conceptually. Rather, they should be understood in terms that are formed and embodied and are appropriate for that realm. Therefore, the *wasīlah* is really a pulpit, and really has a thousand steps, but it is not like the pulpits of this world. Nor are its steps like the steps of this world; they correspond to that realm. The banner is also really a flag, and has a flagstaff and a finial, all of which are appropriate for that realm. And since the Prophet is the sole and exclusive occupant of the station of the Praised One (*Maqām al-maḥmūd*), it is he who will first receive this standard and locus of all Praise. This is the station where all praise ultimately ends up and belongs.

Previously, we had mentioned that according to the Qur'anic injunction *Glory be to God above that they describe, except for God's sincere servants*,[472] only those purified by God (*mukhlaṣīn*) can truly praise God as He should be praised. Whenever any other person praises God, his praise is often accompanied by similitude and glorification of God, or other attributes that person's praise assigns to Him.

As for those purified by God, they are those who have traversed beyond self-centeredness and feelings of grandiosity. They have devoted their whole being to God and do not see

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[471] Kulayni, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, vol. I p. 23. See also *Tuḥaf ul-'Uqūl*, p. 37.
[472] Qur'an, 37: 159–60

their existence independent of Him. They are free of any semblances of conceit or self-centeredness. They have fully annihilated their selves in God Who has expanded their chest by the expansiveness of His Being. Only this group of servants could praise God as He is worthy of praise. This is the station of the prophets and some of God's Friends (*awli'yā*)—those who have reached the station of sincerity (*khulūṣ*) and are prepared for and can occupy it. It is the end of the first of four journeys towards God. This journey is not infinite; it has an end, and that end is God.

However, the station of the praised (*Maqām al-maḥmūd*) is an entirely different station. It is far greater and loftier than any other, the ultimate conclusion to the four journeys in their entirety. It is the culmination of the final journey, from creation back towards God (*sayr min al-Haqq ila'l-khalq*), wherein the wayfarer sees God is with all beings. And he travels through the world of multiplicity guided by the light of God. This final station, which is subsistence in God (*baqā' bi'lLāh*), however, is not commensurate for all wayfarers: some will subsist in the Divine, limited to the purview of their own existence, within the range of their own thoughts and mind; others will have a wider range, and others even wider, until we finally arrive at the station of God's Messenger wherein he subsists with God within all of creation. In other words, he subsists with all beings other than God, from the world of the Kingdom to Dominion, from higher intellect to high and lowly souls, and from existent things in the realm of form and the world of nature. He subsists in essence as the reality of all those beings, but also and secondly as an accident in the very existence that is attributable to them. This, indeed is the station of the praised (*Maqām al-maḥmūd*).

For we have said that this is a station wherein any praise from any person that any object receives is in reality directed towards that station. Any flower we smell and appreciate, we are in reality appreciating his station, meaning the flower's existence, its beauty, its fragrance—all are the Messenger of God. And our being, as the subjects of that praise, and the being of

our praise, are also the Prophet. This is also true of the nightingale we admire, and the moon and the sun, and all the beauty of this world, and all the exuberance and love, life, power, and knowledge therein. All are the Messenger of God. The Prophet has such an expansive spirit and existence within the station of subsistence (*baqā'*) that he encompasses all spiritual and esoteric beings from the inward realm of the Dominion to the outward world of the Kingdom. It is this station of universal *wilāyah* that we believe the Imāms possess. And because the Imām is concomitant with our very existence, and with the existence of all creatures, he is even closer to our selves than we are. When we say "I," we first and in essence refer to the Imām, and only secondarily and accidentally refer to ourselves. Therefore, wherever we may be, if we call upon him, he will understand and respond. The Imām is concomitant and concurrent with every drop that falls from the sky, with every ray of sunlight, with every petal that has fallen to the ground. He is with every heavenly object and star that lights the sky, from our solar system to the farthest galaxies of the universe. This is the depth and extent of the Imām's spiritual dominion within the realm of subsistence (*baqā'*). And this is what the *Engendered Wilāyah* (*Wilāyat-i takwīnīyah*) would entail. None of the prophets, not even Noah, the Master of all Messengers (*Shaykh al-nabiyīn*), not even the great Abraham, the flag-bearer of Divine Unity, enjoyed such a status.

The first person who enjoyed this status, who, by the leave of God and His guidance and light, was given such command at that realm of subsistence (*baqā'*), was that most sacred and holy being, the Prophet of Islam, the Seal of all prophets and messengers. Thereafter, it was bequeathed to his singular disciple, 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib, who took on the title of commanding and ruling over the faithful believers—in other words, the true Commander of the Faithful; hence, the Banner of Praise was handed to him after being given to the Prophet. This lofty status, this apex of *wilāyah*, was then transferred to the grandsons of the Prophet, Ḥassan and Ḥusayn, and the nine descendants of Imām Ḥusayn, who would pass the mantle consecutively, until it arrived upon al-Ḥujjah ibn al-Ḥassan al-'Askarī, the one

who will rise (*Qā'im*) of the Prophetic progeny, Presently, he is the exclusive pole of creation. He is the unitary axis of both engendered and legislative *wilāyah*. Thus, the Imām has an existential concomitance with all beings in the created realm. This concomitance is not purely epistemic; rather it is true and real. Therefore, when you call out, "O! Master of this Age (*Yā Ṣāḥib al-zamān*)," he is right there with you, wherever you may be.

This gate of Divine knowledge that is bestowed on the prophetic family and his community derives from the blessed presence of the Prophet. It was not bestowed on any of the previous religious communities. For no community can move beyond the guidance and level of their prophet. This was not a path that was open to those prophets, and naturally that is also true for their communities. However, this path is available only to the community of the final Prophet. It is these few noble men who, through eternal Divine assistance, and through their spiritual effort, sincerity, and servitude, have arrived upon the shores of Divine legislation and have drunk from the waters of Divine Subsistence. As a result, their existence has been expanded to encompass all of the creation, just as was true of the Prophet of God.

Now that this issue is clear, we can understand why that banner is called the Banner of "Praise"; because uttering formulae such as *God is the Greatest* (*takbīr*), or saying, *There is no god but God* (*tahlīl*), praising God (*tasbīḥ*), or any other forms of invocation (*dhikr*) are not as comprehensive at that realm of Divine Subsistence. He who attains the station commensurate to those types of prayers and supplications would not necessarily attain the station of the Praised One (*maḥmūd*).

We understand why the Prophet bestowed this banner on the Commander of the Faithful, who came to possess the greatest level of *wilāyah*, which was then bequeathed from one Imām to the next after him. We also found out why all prophets stand underneath this Banner of Praise upheld by Muhammad and 'Ali, as none of them reached that station and only await and hope sincerely for the overflowing grace of the Divine to

pour forth upon them through its channels, namely, Muhammad and 'Ali.

In addition, we can also understand why all the martyrs and the truthful and righteous worshipers and the faithful believers have also surrounded this sacred pulpit. It is primarily because none of them have traversed through the veils of light. None of them have annihilated themselves in any of the Divine Names.

It thus becomes clear why the Banner of Praise is inscribed with the following phrases: "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. All Praise is to Allah, the Lord of the realms. There is no deity but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God." For this banner encompasses all realms. It bestows and fulfills the existential needs of all creation through two Divine Names, the Compassionate (al-Raḥmān) and Merciful (al-Raḥīm). It allows for the praise of God to apply to and be realized for all beings that possess beauty, and proclaim the Unicity of God and the Message of the Prophet to all the realms.

* * *

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Sixty-Sixth Discourse

On the Cup-Bearer of the Pool of Paradise (Kawthar) and its Rivers

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *Surely We have given thee abundance.*[473]

In the celebrated Qur'ānic exegesis, the *Majma' al-Bayān*, it is stated that many *aḥādīth* indicate that al-Kawthar is a paradisal river. Each *ḥadīth* presents a different set of attributes for it. Ibn 'Abbās states that it is a "great good." 'Ikrimah states that it refers to the prophethood and the book of God. Ḥassan says it is the Qur'an, and Abū Bakr ibn 'Ayyāsh states it refers to the multitudes of companions and followers [of the Prophet]. Some say it is the progeny and the descendants of the Messenger of God. According to a report, Imām Ṣādiq says that it is intercession. The word *kawthar* could have all of these meanings, all of which are derivatives of that single word, *kawthar*, a word that in itself refers to a great bounty and good in this world and the Hereafter.[474]

There are many traditions about the Fount of Kawthar, narrations that describe its nature and attributes, and that the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali, possesses and oversees it, permitting the Shī'a and all lovers of the Ahl al-Bayt to drink from it, while staving off their enemies from it.[475] Here, just a small sampling of those *aḥādīth* will suffice.

In the older lithograph edition of the text, '*Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, its states, "The Prophet of God once said, 'Whoever does

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[473] Qur'an, 108: 1

[474] A summary on Kawthar as described in Shaykh Ṭabarsī's commentary on the Qur'an, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 5, p. 549

[475] 'Allāmah Ṭihrānī mentions many of these *aḥādīth* from both Shī'a and Sunni sources in the 9th volume of *Ma'ād Shenāsī*. See vol. IX, pp. 436–51.

not believe in my Fount, God will not permit him to come to the Fount [on the Day of Judgment].'"[476]

Ibn 'Abbās narrates,

> When the above verse was revealed, 'Ali asked the Prophet: "O Messenger of God, what is this Kawthar?" The Prophet responded, "It is a river that God has bestowed upon me so as to honor me." The Commander of the Faithful said, "This must be an honorable river. Please describe for us its attributes and qualities."
>
> The Prophet replied, "Indeed, 'Ali, it is! The Kawthar is a river that flows from underneath the throne of God. Its water is whiter than milk, sweeter than honey, and softer than butter. Its sand is composed of gems, of aquamarine, ruby, and coral. The grass that surrounds it is of saffron, and its dirt is of a fragrant musk. Its sources are located under that Divine throne, Glorious and Majestic is He."
>
> At this point, the Prophet touched Imām 'Ali's side, and said, "This river is for you, me, and those who love you, those who will come after me."

There is also a tradition narrated on the authority of Imām Ṣādiq wherein he states,

> The Prophet of God said, "Whoever wants to free himself from the terrors of the Day of Judgment, then follow my *walī*, and abide by my trustee and my vicegerent who will succeed me, 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib. For he is the master of my Fount, fending off from that Fount all his enemies, and giving drink to all his friends. Whosoever does not drink from it will suffer a persistent thirst, and will never be satiated. And whosoever is given a sip of it to drink will not suffer fatigue or misery, and will never thirst again."

In his authoritative book, *al-Manāqib,* Ibn Shahr Āshūb has collected many such traditions—narrated by the majority

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[476] *'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā,* page 91

scholars of *ḥadīth* of different schools, among which are the following: in *Kitāb al-Fā'iq*, Zamakhsharī states that the Prophet told Imām 'Ali, "You will prevent people from my Fount on the Day of Judgment, just as a diseased animal is prevented." A camel is called *ṣādī* if it has the disease of *ṣayd*.[477]

And it is reported through five different chains of transmission that the Prophet of God said, "O 'Ali, you will come to me at the Fount while your Shī'a will be fully satiated, and while your enemies will come to you, thirsty and shackled."[478]

Other *aḥādīth*, from both Shī'ī and Sunni sources, also attest to this reality. For example, the *ḥadīth* of the Two Weighty Matters (*al-Thaqalayn*), or those that elaborate and explain verse 21 of chapter 76, *and their Lord shall give them to drink a pure drink.*

All these traditions are in general agreement in terms of their meaning. They all state that the close friends and Shī'a, those true lovers of the Ahl al-Bayt, will benefit from that Fount, whereas their enemies will not. Whoever drinks from the waters of that Fount will be fully satiated, and will never become thirsty again. And because its waters are both pure and spiritually purifying, whoever is purified by its waters will remain as such, as his face and form become radiant, while his heart becomes serene and tranquil. Whoever is prevented from it, his face and form will become darkened and ugly, his body putrid, his soul corrupted, and his belly parched and desiccated. And generally, only those who are connected to and connect themselves to *wilāyah* will benefit from it.

Now, we must find out the nature of this Fount. What is the essence of that water, a substance that displays such coveted effects and attributes?

Previously, we discussed how the Hereafter is the true manifestation of the reality behind this world, and that water is the source of all life. For example, [the Qur'an] says, *And we made*

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[477] *Ṣayd* is a disease that causes the camel to twist and tremble its neck. See Ibn Shahr Āshūb, *Manāqib*, lithograph edition, vol. I p. 350.
[478] Ibid.

from water every living thing.[479] We also have a Prophetic tradition that "The first thing God created is water." Now, by adding these references to two other prophetic traditions that state, "The first creation of God was the intellect" and "The first being God created is the light of your Prophet, O Jābir," it becomes clear that water in the first *ḥadīth* is referring to the essential constituent of life, which is also the true reality of knowledge and the intellect. Based on this principle, many Qur'anic verses state: *God will place the faithful-believers and those who do righteous deeds in Gardens under which rivers flow...*[480]

This is because the believers will have fully recognized that Divine knowledge and cognition through their belief and its effects, which are their righteous deeds. Therefore, bounteous rivers will flow through the gardens endlessly in that realm, which are in reality that Divine knowledge and cognizance which flow through their souls endlessly in this realm. A believer's heart indeed continuously radiates spiritual knowledge and is the source from which Divine knowledge and inspiration radiate. *But the godfearing shall be amidst gardens and fountains,*[481] and *Truly the godfearing shall dwell amid shades and fountains.*[482]

Essentially it means that Divine knowledge and Divine cognizance can at times be pristine and immaculate, without any interference from personal thoughts or desires. In these cases, they manifest in the world of Dominion as pristine and immaculate water, as pristine as a teardrop. This occurs in those souls brought nigh to God (*muqarrabūn*), who purified their selves through contemplation and invocation (*dhikr*), through worship and servitude, through a complete contentment and entrusting of their affairs to God. They attain it through their night vigils and daily fasts, their struggles for

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[479] Qur'an, 21: 30

[480] This verse has been mentioned 38 times in different contexts in the Qur'an.

[481] Qur'an, 15: 45

[482] Qur'an, 77: 41

knowledge and true Divine cognizance, and through their satiating others who also thirst for that knowledge. *A fountain whereat drink the servants of God, making it to gush forth plenteously*[483] and *A fountain at which do drink those brought nigh.*[484]

The Qur'an mentions four different rivers that flow through Paradise. The first is a river of milk, whose taste never changes. This "river of milk" symbolizes the celestial manifestation of knowledge particular to the novice on the spiritual journey and the weak among the seekers on the path. It symbolizes this because milk is the drink of children. Second, there is a river whose pure waters, neither fetid nor putrid, symbolize the pure and undiluted manifestation of Divine knowledge and discernment, for it is knowledge and discernment that keep the heart alive. The eternal purity of the water of this river indicates that this knowledge is entirely unadulterated by any tempting thoughts of the carnal soul (*nafsānīyah*) or devilish desires. Third, there is a river of purified honey, symbolizing the inspirations of the heart (*al-wāridāt al-qalbīyah*) from the Divine realm, those luminous sparks and joyous moments which the intermediary spiritual wayfarers experience and which create spiritual joy and ecstatic states in their souls. The purity of honey symbolizes the purity of Divine knowledge, free of all impurities that are occasionally imprinted on the soul, caused by the temptation of the carnal soul. The fourth is a river of wine, satisfying and pleasing to those who imbibe it. It is the manifestation of all beauty and love for the Infinite Essence of the Divine. It is where the wayfarer loses himself entirely in the brilliance of the Divine. It is when the Divine Magnificence becomes fully manifest, and the wayfarer loses all attachments to this world, whether those attachments be to wealth or status. That drink is called Pure Wine (*sharāb ṭahūr*). *Upon them shall be green garments of silk and brocade; they are adorned with*

483 Qur'an, 76: 6

484 Qur'an, 83: 28

bracelets of silver, and their Lord shall give them to drink a pure draught.[485]

The term *ṭahūr* denotes purity and also the act of purification. [In this context] it indicates that as soon as the wayfarer faces the glory and magnificence of the Divine, that Divine knowledge and that consciousness will at once burn and annihilate the being of the wayfarer. As Ḥāfiẓ of Shīrāz states,

> I want a wine whose strength will humble men
> So that I could become free of this world and its evil.[486]

It is these Divine attractions that are indispensable and help to actualize the ultimate goal of a lifelong spiritual struggle that is reaching the ultimate station of annihilation in the Divine Self, as those who attained this station explained: "A single attraction from God, the Most Compassionate, outbalances the worship of all men and *jinn*."[487]

If that yearning for the Divine continues to thrive in the seeker, Divine knowledge and cognition will be coupled with a passionate love and will give the seeker serenity and peace. This is like adding an amount of ginger [which is a hot substance] to wine [which is a cold substance] to create balance, *And therein they shall be given to drink a cup whose mixture is ginger.* And if God wills to make them somewhat tranquil, He will bestow upon them a certain calm and peace by manifesting His Beauty, as through introducing a certain amount of camphor (a cool substance) into their chalice: *Surely the pious shall drink of a cup whose mixture is camphor a fountain whereat drink the servants of God, making it to gush forth plenteously.*[488] In the same way, if one's approach towards that Divine knowledge is coupled with denial and pride, that knowledge will appear in the form of a boiling and scorching water, which will be poured down their throats, a water that, as it burns, will only

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[485] Qur'an, 76: 21

[486] شراب تلخ مي خواهم كه مرد أفكن بود زورش   كه تا يكدم بياسايم ز دنيا و شر و شورش

[487] جَذبةٌ من جَذَبات الرَحمن تَوَازِي عِبادة الثقلين

[488] Qur'an, 76: 5

worsen their thirst ever more. *Roasting at a scorching fire, watered at a boiling fountain...*[489]

Then there is the wellspring of Tasnīm, some of which is sealed with heavenly wine, *as they are given to drink of a wine sealed; whose seal is musk—so after that let the strivers strive.*[490]

Its waters flow from the A'rāf [the heavenly Ramparts], which in turn function as a veil between Heaven and Hell, and upon which are located the pure Imāms, who preside over both Heaven and Hell. This wellspring of Tasnīm is located under the foot of Imām 'Ali, and flows therefrom, pouring onto the Fount of Kawthar. This Fount of Kawthar is, then, a mixture of both the waters of Tasnīm and the waters of Ma'īn, and is efficacious in washing and enlivening the hearts of the sinful. The waters of Ma'īn represent that Divine knowledge, whereas the waters of Tasnīm symbolize that love and *wilāyah*. When these two are mixed, they produce an elixir comprised of Divine knowledge and *wilāyah*; in other words, true *tawḥīd*. It is this elixir that satiates and revivifies the hearts of the seekers; and whosoever drinks from these waters will never feel thirst again, and whosoever does not will never be satiated and content.

Indeed, 'Ali is the gate to Prophetic knowledge, as the Prophet said, "I am the city of knowledge and 'Ali is its gate." He is the keeper of the Prophetic *wilāyah*.[491] Therefore, whosoever comes nigh to that rank of *wilāyah*, and has reaped the benefits of Imām 'Ali's knowledge and *wilāyah*, will in truth drink from that Fount of Kawthar. 'Ali is that source of knowledge; he has fully realized the truth and its inner reality; he is the wellspring of *wilāyah* and pure submission and servanthood. Thus, whoever cultivates enmity towards him, does not yield that lofty rank to him, and refuses to accept his covenant, has distanced himself from the truth. This person will be utterly parched, and his heart desiccated; such a person will not have

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489 Qur'an, 88: 4–5

490 Qur'an, 83: 25–26

491 "You will be the *Walī* of every believing man and believing woman after me."—*hadīth*

any recourse to the Fount, because this water is prohibited to disbelievers and the obstinate deniers of the truth. *The inhabitants of the Fire shall call to the inhabitants of Paradise: "Pour on us water, or of that God has provided you!" They will say: "God has forbidden them to the unbelievers…"*[492]

The Hereafter is indeed a place wherein the inner realities of all things become manifest. A person who did not prepare himself through faith, righteous deeds, and the strengthening of those bonds of *wilāyah* and obedience towards the Ahl al-Bayt will not drink from that wellspring of spiritual life, and will not taste the sweetness of *wilāyah*. He will descend, with his face darkened and his being desiccated and parched. In contrast, the bearers of *wilāyah*, those lovers of the Ahl al-Bayt, will be fully satiated and radiant. Thus, the Fount of Kawthar is indeed that place wherein *wilāyah* is fully exhibited and all those detailed descriptions of this Fount—from its great size to the bowls that surround it, from the streams that feed it to the grass that grows around it, and even the tents that neighbor it—all of these are true and real, and are all established and preserved in that higher spiritual realm of forms; and yet all of these are simply manifestations of the reality behind Divine knowledge and *wilāyah*.

What was presented in these pages was a brief discourse on the river Kawthar and its cup-bearer, the Commander of the Faithful. The reality of Kawthar, however, cannot be contained in such descriptions. All peculiar characteristics of the river notwithstanding, in reality it is nothing but manifestation of the reality of the station of *wilāyah* and the knowledge associated with it. May God nurture our soul by its grace, if He wills.

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[492] Qur'an, 7: 50

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Sixty-Seventh Discourse

A'arāf and Its Inhabitants

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *And between them is a veil, and on the Ramparts are men knowing each by their mark, who shall call to the inhabitants of Paradise: "Peace be upon you!" They have not entered it, for all their eagerness.*[493]

This noble verse shows us the location and status of A'arāf and its inhabitants, which in the gathering place on of the Day of Judgment (*'arasāt*) stands between Paradise and Hell overlooking both, and separating the wretched from the saved ones.[494] The verses that follow are indeed relevant to this discussion: *And when their eyes are turned towards the inhabitants of the Fire they shall say, "Our Lord, do not Thou assign us with the people of the evildoers." And the dwellers on the Battlements shall call to certain men they know by their sign: "Your amassing has not availed you, neither your waxing proud. Are these the ones that you swore God would never reach with mercy?" Enter Paradise; no fear upon you, nor*

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[493] Qur'an, 7: 46

[494] Verses preceding this verse state, *And those who believe, and do deeds of righteousness—We charge not any soul, save according to its capacity; those are the inhabitants of Paradise, therein dwelling forever; We shall strip away all rancour that is in their breasts; and underneath them rivers flowing; and they will say, "Praise belongs to God, who guided us unto this; had God not guided us, we had surely never been guided. Indeed, our Lord's Messengers came with the truth." And it will be proclaimed: "This is your Paradise; you have been given it as your inheritance for what you did." The inhabitants of Paradise will call to the inhabitants of the Fire: "We have found that which our Lord promised us true; have you found what your Lord promised you true?" "Yes," they will say. And then a herald shall proclaim between them: "God's curse is on the evildoers who bar from God's way, desiring to make it crooked, disbelieving in the world to come"* 7: 40–44.

shall you sorrow. The inhabitants of the Fire shall call to the inhabitants of Paradise: "Pour on us water, or of that God has provided you!" They will say: "God has forbidden them to the unbelievers who have taken their religion as a diversion and a sport, and whom the present life has deluded."—Therefore today We forget them as they forgot the encounter of this their day, and that they denied Our signs.[495]

A thorough analysis of these verses indicate that A'arāf is a distance that functions as a veil between the inhabitants of Paradise and those of Hell. This veil has a number of levels. On the highest level reside those sanctified souls who dominate over Heaven and Hell. They are identified and recognized by the sign and the luminosity of their countenance. They are those who attained such a high station in terms of purity of their souls and proximity to God that Heaven and Hell are both under their control and will. They are the ones who address the righteous to *enter paradise*[496] and *are all known by their marks.*[497] They address the dwellers of Hell with *"God's curse is on the evildoers who bar from God's way."*[498] They are the ones who call the righteous to Paradise, and welcome them: *And they call unto the dwellers of the Garden, Peace be unto you!*[499]

On the lower levels of A'arāf there are those who are connected to the sanctified souls and are their followers, like the army of a king, those who because of the sins they had committed will not go to Heaven directly and wait for God's mercy while they wait between Heaven and Hell. They are the ones who greet the inhabitants of Heaven and say, "*Peace be upon you.*"[500] When they turn to the oppressors, they say, "*Our Lord, do not Thou assign us with the people of the evildoers.*"[501]

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495 Qur'an, 7: 45–49
496 Qur'an, 15: 32
497 Qur'an, 7: 46
498 Qur'an, 7: 44
499 Qur'an, 7: 46
500 Ibid.
501 Qur'an, 7: 47

Since those who were purified by God do not attend the gathering place on the Day of Judgment for reckoning,[502] they attain the station of subsistence after annihilation (*baqā' ba'd al fanā'*) and the station of the ultimate union, which is called the "comprehension of all comprehensiveness" (*jam' al-jam'*). This station is above Heaven and Hell, and they reside behind the most proximate veil. They observe all others, recognize them, and define their stations.

The term *a'arāf* has two meanings. One denotes the veil and the other one refers to low hills that are created by wind in the desert and can hide things beyond them. In the Qur'an both of these meaning are present, once in a dialogue between believers and disbelievers and another time between believers and hypocrites: *Upon the day when the hypocrites, men and women, shall say to those who have believed, "Wait for us, so that we may borrow your light!" It shall be said, "Return you back behind, and seek for a light!" And a wall shall be set up between them, having a door in the inward whereof is mercy, and against the outward thereof is chastisement*[503] and, *And between them is a veil, and on the Ramparts are men knowing each by their mark, who shall call to the inhabitants of Paradise: "Peace be upon you!" They have not entered it, for all their eagerness. The inhabitants of the Fire shall call to the inhabitants of Paradise: "Pour on us water, or of that God has provided you!" They will say: "God has forbidden them to the unbelievers who have taken their religion as a diversion and a sport, and whom the present life has deluded."*[504]

As we notice in the above, the wall and the veil are used with identical meaning and have outward and inward aspects. Inwardly they allude to God's mercy, and outwardly they denote chastisement. Those who understood and acknowledged the reality of the faith in this world and believed sincerely will go beyond the veil/wall, whereas those who claimed to be believers out of expediency or personal interest will be in state of

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[502] Qur'an, 37 :127–28
[503] Qur'an, 57: 13
[504] Qur'an, 7: 46–50

torment behind it. It is clear that the believers and disbelievers both stand before the same wall/veil as they both follow the same route toward God, and both have the ability to make a choice. It is only their perceptions that differ; the believers are steadfast and follow the straight path, while disbelievers are deviated from it and follow the wrong path, as the Qur'an eloquently explains this process: *Upon the day when the hypocrites, men and women, shall say to those who have believed, "Wait for us, so that we may borrow your light!" It shall be said, "Return you back behind, and seek for a light!" And a wall shall be set up between them, having a door in the inward whereof is mercy, and against the outward thereof is chastisement. They shall be calling unto them, "Were we not with you?" They shall say, "Yes indeed; but you tempted yourselves, and you awaited, and you were in doubt, and fancies deluded you, until God's commandment came, and the Deluder deluded you concerning God."*[505]

Therefore, the path for believers and disbelievers is the same, and both will stand before God on the Day of Judgment, one to be rewarded because of his sincerity in faith, and the other to be chastised because of his lack of faith and sincerity of intention: *They know an outward part of the present life, but of the Hereafter they are heedless.*[506] And the outward is always perishable, temporary, and transient. Therefore, the ultimate goal of believers is the realm of the truth where there is no lying or vain playing, the abode *where Therein they shall hear no idle talk, no cause of sin, only the saying "Peace, Peace!"*[507]

The inhabitants of A'arāf, by virtue of their stations, stand between Paradise and Hell and observe believers and disbelievers. However, when the Qur'an refers to them, it indeed suggests their spiritual standing and station, and not just the location where they stand. They will not attend the gathering place on the Day of Judgment and their station will be veiled in all-

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505 Qur'an, 57: 13

506 Qur'an, 30: 7

507 Qur'an, 56: 25. See also 78: 35

encompassing mercy. They will question the sinners and the dwellers of Hell on that day, as they will also guide believers to enter Paradise, telling them, *Enter the Garden. No fears shall come upon you nor is it you who will grieve.*[508]

Narrations about A'arāf can be divided into several categories in accordance with the context it is used and in relation to issues discussed. The first category is from the linguistic point of view where the term is used to denote consciousness and knowledge. 'Ayyāshī narrates a *ḥadīth* on the authority of Salmān [Fārsi] who, on more than ten occasions, heard the Prophet say, "O 'Ali! Verily you and your legatees after you are like A'arāf between Heaven and Hell. Nobody will enter Paradise except him who recognizes you and whom you recognize, and nobody will enter Hell except him who does not know you and whom you do not know.[509]

When someone asked Imām Bāqir on the meaning of the following verse: *On the Heights there are men who know them all by their marks*,[510] he replied,

> We are the A'arāf, those through whom God will be known, and nobody will enter Heaven unless he recognizes us and we recognize him, and no one will enter Hell unless we do not know him and he does not know us. If God willed to be known without any intermediary, He would have done that, but He placed us as a means, and as a gate to enter through and know Him.[511]

The second category of narrations regarding A'arāf is those that suggest Imām 'Ali is the person who will identify and declare which will go to Paradise and which will enter Hell. According to Ṭabarsī and his teacher on the authority of Muhammad ibn Ḥanafīyah, when 'Ali was asked about the identity of the caller that the Qur'an refers to on the Day of Judgment, *And then a herald (mu'adhdhin) shall proclaim between them:*

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[508] Qur'an, 7: 49
[509] 'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 18
[510] Qur'an, 7: 48
[511] 'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 18

"God's curse is on the evildoers who bar from God's way,"[512] 'Ali said, "I am that caller."[513]

The third group of narrations indicates that the men of A'arāf are indeed the progeny of the Prophet. Ibn Maḥjūb, on the authority of Abū Ayyūb [Anṣāri], narrated that a certain Burayd 'Ijlī asked Imām Bāqir about the Men of A'arāf. He said that they are Imāms from the line of the Prophet who on the Day of Judgment intercede on behalf of those believers who committed some sins.[514]

The fourth category of narrations suggests that Imāms are aware of the presence of their followers who committed sins and hope for their intercession to earn God's forgiveness: *They enter it not although they hope [to enter]*. The Imāms will turn to their enemies in Hell saying that in the world they were convinced that God would not have mercy on their [sinful] followers, and they will never enter Paradise. Now see how God forgives them by His mercy and tells them, *Enter Paradise; no fear upon you, nor shall you sorrow.*[515]

Finally, there is the fifth group of narrations, according to which the Imāms know those sinners whose good and evil deeds are equal, and no verdict is issued about them. According to Imām Ṣādiq, "Those are the people whose good and evil deeds and their virtues and vices are equal. If God chooses to punish them, He has not been unjust to them, but shall bring them into Heaven by His own mercy."[516]

The preceding discussion makes it clear that A'arāf is an exalted station at the highest point of which the Imāms reside and at its lowest levels, their followers who committed sins, as well as other sinners who have not been through reckoning yet, nor has a verdict been issued about them. One may ask why

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[512] Qur'an, 7: 42

[513] Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. II, p. 422, and Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. VIII, p. 331

[514] As quoted in *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, part 10, *ḥadīth* # 5, Ḥurūfi edition, p. 496, lithograph edition, p. 145

[515] Qur'an, 7: 49

[516] 'Ayyāshi, *Tafsīr*, vol. II, p. 18. See also Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. VIII, p. 337.

our discussion focuses on male descendants of the Prophet and why there is no mention of female members of the Ahl al-Bayt, especial such exceptional women as the Prophet's daughter Fāṭimah. The simple answer is that the station in A'arāf is beyond gender, and male and female are both equally present there. Without a doubt Fāṭimah will also be present on A'arāf along with her children. We already mentioned that in some narrations her equality—even perhaps superiority—over male members of the Ahl al-Bayt is established. However, as in many other traditions, in any discussion on A'arāf the name is omitted out of respect, but she is indeed one of those Men of A'arāf (*Rijāl al-A'arāf*), *rijāl* being a term that is applied equally to both male and female in the Arabic language. No less an authority than Muhy al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī praised her station in such terms as

> God, His angels, and the carrier of His Throne and all His servants on His earth and in His Paradise send greeting to her, [who is] a Sacred Essence in a human soul, the Universal Soul in a [human] form, a part of the Muhammadān reality, the source of light of 'Alawīyah, the savior of those who love her from fire, the fruit of the tree of certainty, the Master of the ladies of the worlds, the apple of the eye of the Prophet, the Immaculate and pure, may endless greeting and praise be upon her.[517]

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[517] Part of the well-known poem on benediction composed by Ibn 'Arabī, translated and published under the title of *Sharh-i Manāqib*, n.p., n.d.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Sixty-Eighth Discourse

Paradise and Its Location

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *Then those that feared their Lord shall be driven in companies into Paradise, till, when they have come thither, and its gates are opened, and its keepers will say to them, "Peace be upon you! Well you have fared; enter in, to dwell forever." And they shall say, "Praise belongs to God, who has been true in His promise to us, and has bequeathed upon us the earth, for us to make our dwelling wheresoever we will in Paradise." How excellent is the wage of those that labour! And thou shalt see the angels encircling about the Throne proclaiming the praise of their Lord; and justly the issue shall be decided between them; and it shall be said, "Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being."*[518]

Describing the effects of piety and fearing God, Imām 'Ali said,

> Know that he who is pious and godfearing, God opens a way out of all seditions and places a guiding light out of darkness for him. He grants him whatever he desires eternally. He lands him in the realm of dignity, in a house that He built for Himself. He extends the shade of His throne over that house, and His pleasure extends light over it. His angels will visit him and His messengers will be his friends and companions.... So try to excel in your deeds so that you become the companions of God's neighbors in his House, those who are His messengers and friends, and angels visit them. Those whose ears God has exalted so that they would not hear even the sound of fire, and whose bodies God protects

[518] Qur'an, 39: 73–75

> from hardships; all these are from God's mercy and generosity, Who bestows upon whom He will. Indeed, "God is of Infinite bounty."[519]

Praise belongs to God Who led us to this station that is to describe Paradise. This is a very important and subtle issue because ultimately, Paradise is the true abode of man, his refuge and his true home. That is the reason there are countless traditions and narrations about it, including nearly three hundred verses in the Qur'an in description of Paradise. Before dealing with them, however, let us find out where the location of Heaven is.

In the verse that was presented in the beginning of this chapter we read on behalf of the inhabitants of Paradise, who say, *Praise belongs to God, who has been true in His promise to us, and has bequeathed upon us the earth, for us to make our dwelling wheresoever we will in Paradise.* Reading this verse helps us to conclude that there must be a special connection between Heaven and earth. Perhaps the *promise* made in the above verse is elaborated in another verse in chapter 21, where God says, *For We have written in the Psalms, after the Remembrance, "The earth shall be the inheritance of My righteous servants." Surely in this is a Message delivered unto a people who serve.*[520]

The word "inheritance" denotes that someone is in possession of something that was transmitted to him and that was in someone else's possession before, in other words, transfer of ownership of something from predecessors to their successors. In the verses just mentioned, God's righteous servants are the inheritors of the earth. The first verse that establishes the inheritance of earth by God's righteous servants also emphasizes that such servants can *make our dwelling wheresoever we will in Paradise.* Therefore, there must be a connection and a spe-

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[519] *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon #181, pp. 347–49. See also Abduh edition, Cairo, pp. 347–49.
[520] Qur'an, 21: 105

cial relationship between Paradise and the earth. This relationship has been discussed in many other verses in the Qur'an as well. For example, *[Those] who fulfil God's covenant, and break not the compact, who join what God has commanded shall be joined, and fear their Lord, and dread the evil reckoning, patient men, desirous of the Face of their Lord, who perform the prayer, and expend of that We have provided them, secretly and in public, and who avert evil with good—theirs shall be the Ultimate Abode, Gardens of Eden which they shall enter; and those who were righteous of their fathers, and their wives, and their seed, shall enter them, and the angels shall enter unto them from every gate: "Peace be upon you, for that you were patient." Fair is the Ultimate Abode.*[521]

This and other verses in fact indicate that Paradise, that *the Ultimate Abode, Gardens of Eden*, is right here on this earth! Entering Paradise is indeed the ultimate reward of attaining perfections.[522] We must, however, know that the earth that the Qur'an talks about is not like the earth we know; rather, it is a clean, pure, and luminous land: *Upon the day the earth shall be changed to other than the earth*,[523] and, *And the earth shall shine with the light of its Lord.*[524]

Many scholars such as Majlisī[525] believe that Paradise is above the sevenfold skies. Many other Muslim scholars accept this view. However, since all galaxies and other planets constitute the heavens (skies) for the earth, as the Qur'an states—*We have adorned the lower heaven with the adornment of the stars*—our interpretation is not in contradiction with the opinions of other scholars. Therefore, it is possible that the inner

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[521] Qur'an, 13: 22–24. See also 7: 100 and 7: 137.

[522] See also 7: 128: *Said Moses to his people, "Pray for succour to God, and be patient; surely the earth is God's and He bequeaths it to whom He will among His servants. The issue ultimate is to the godfearing"* and 19: 63, *That is Paradise which We shall give as an inheritance to those of Our servants who are godfearing.*

[523] Qur'an, 14: 48

[524] Qur'an, 39: 69

[525] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. VIII, p. 133

reality of earth is the Seventh Heaven where Paradise is located. According to the Qur'an the width of Paradise is as extensive as the earth and skies: *And vie with one another, hastening to forgiveness from your Lord, and to a garden whose breadth is as the heavens and earth, prepared for the godfearing...*[526]

Once a man asked the Prophet, "If Paradise is as vast as the skies and earth, then where is Hell?" The Prophet replied by asking the man a question: "So when the day descends, where is the night?" This answer indeed guides us to the reality of Paradise and earth. As day and night are two states on earth that can never occur together, so are Paradise and Hell two accidents that occur in Paradise and on the earth. Paradise is the inner reality, and Dominion in the world that is nigh to God, whereas Hell is the outward in the world of the kingdom in the world that is distanced from God. These two realms never encounter one another. The world of Paradise is the realm of meaning and truth, and knowledge and gnosis and final removal of the veil, while the realm of Hell is the world of falsehood, ignorance, and many veils. These two realms can never exist in one place together. When knowledge steps in, it removes ignorance, when the truth comes in, it pushes away the falsehood, and similarly, when Paradise comes in, it removes Hell. Therefore, both Paradise and Hell are on the earth and in the skies, but where Paradise is present, Hell is absent.

This is true also in the human domain. When the light of knowledge and gnosis removes the veils of ignorance, ignorance and veil no longer exist in that sacred realm. When the light of knowledge illuminates the temples of the world of multiplicity and the souls of its inhabitants, that is where Paradise is. Similarly, in the realm of ignorance and blindness, when things are assumed to have independent existence [of God], that is the manifestation of Hell. The very same Paradise whose width is as wide as the earth and skies is indeed the world of

[526] Qur'an, 3: 133. See also 57: 21: *Race to forgiveness from your Lord, and a Garden the breadth whereof is as the breadth of heaven and earth, made ready for those who believe in God and His Messengers.*

Dominion (*malakūt*) and the truth and has no conformity with Hell. It is indeed the earth's Dominion (*malakūt al-aeḍ*) that *the day the earth shall be changed to other than the earth,*[527] and, *And the earth shall shine with the light of its Lord.*[528]

The other question in this regard is whether Paradise and Hell have already been created or will be created later. In light of all discussions we had thus far and especially issues such as bodily resurrection, and the permanent existence of deeds in the engendered world, we understand that Paradise and Hell were created and have always been in existence. When Noah's people disobeyed his message *because of their transgressions they were drowned, and admitted into a Fire.*[529] When a believer defended Christ's envoy and people killed him, *It was said, "Enter Paradise!" He said, "Ah, would that my people had knowledge that my Lord has forgiven me and that He has placed me among the honoured."*[530] All these verses indicate that Paradise and Hell already existed.

In addition, there are many traditions, especially those related to the Prophet's ascension to Heaven (*mi'rāj*) in which Paradise and Hell are both mentioned. In his *Kitāb al-Iḥtijāj* Ṭabarsī narrates 'Ali ibn Ibrāhīm and his father Harwī, who recorded the following *ḥadīth* on the authority of 'Ali ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā, who said,

> Indeed, on the night of *mi'rāj*, when they took the Messenger of God he saw Hell first and then entered Paradise. He who denies the creation of Paradise and Hell accuses the Prophet and all of us of lying. Such people are not under our spiritual authority (*wilāyah*) and will eternally reside in Hell,[531] as God says, "This is Hell, that sinners cried lies

[527] Qur'an, 14: 48
[528] Qur'an, 39: 69
[529] Qur'an, 71: 25
[530] Qur'an, 36: 26–27
[531] Ṭabarsī, *Kitāb al-Iḥtijāj*, Najaf edition, vol. II, p. 191. See also *'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, p. 65.

> to."[532] It is narrated that Imām Bāqir said, "By God! Paradise has not been empty of the spirit of believers and Hell has never been empty of the spirit of disbelievers since they were created."[533]

If Paradise and Hell are already in existence, and, as we established, Paradise is in the Dominion and Hell is definitely on earth, then why do the people not see them? The answer is simply because people do not truly open their eyes, as did the blessed Prophet and the Ahl al-Bayt, who could see Heaven and Hell on this earth.

Paradise and Hell are the loci of manifestation of the reality of our deeds. Unfortunately, the eyes of the people will only be opened on the Day of Judgment and in a state of total detachment when they can understand the reality of things. If people opened their eyes, they could see Paradise and Hell here and now: *And Paradise shall be brought forward for the godfearing, and Hell advanced for the perverse*[534] and, *and Hell is advanced for whoever sees.*[535]

It is mentioned in the Qur'an that Hell has seven gates[536] but there is no mention of the number of gates for Paradise. Some traditions indicate that Paradise has eight gates. Perhaps the mystery of one extra gate is in the fact that God's mercy always supersedes His wrath,[537] and therefore, there are always more gates for mercy, generosity, and good than there are the gates for suffering, evil, and pain. Water, which is the symbol of God's mercy in this world, is much more readily available on earth than fire, and has the quality of extinguishing it. Describing his nocturnal journey (*mi'rāj*) the Prophet mentions

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532 Qur'an, 55: 42
533 Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwar,* Hurūfi edition, vol. VIII, p. 133
534 Qur'an, 26: 90–91
535 Qur'an, 79: 36
536 Qur'an, 15: 44: *Gehenna shall be their promised land all together. Seven gates it has, and unto each gate a set portion of them belongs.*
537 As the famous *ḥadīth qudsī* states, "Indeed my Mercy supersedes my wrath."

إنّ رحمتی سبقت غضبی.

eight gates for Paradise, and on the top of each gate three statements are inscribed that are a means of salvation. And those three statements are, "There is no god but God, Muhammad is His Messenger, and 'Ali is His Friend" (*Lā ilāha Il'lLāh, Muhammadun Rasūl Allāh, wa 'Aliyun Wali 'ulLāh*). Under these statements in each gate are inscribed instructions that lead to physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, social equilibrium, justice, and peace. Such traits as contentment, generosity, caring for the poor, moderation in sleep and consumption of food, avoiding vain talk, loving one's neighbor, loving and respecting parents, and paying alms constitute the content of the statement on the top of seven gates. The eighth gate, which is called Rayyān, is specifically assigned to those servants of God who in addition to inculcating the above attributes in their souls, would also be among those who fast. To them belong the highest pavilions in Paradise, *But those who fear their Lord—for them await lofty chambers, above which are built lofty chambers, underneath which rivers flow—God's promise; God fails not the tryst.*[538]

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[538] Qur'an, 39: 21

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Sixty-Ninth Discourse

Paradise Is the Abode of the Pure

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *Surely those who believe, and do deeds of righteousness, their Lord will guide them for their belief; beneath them rivers flowing in gardens of bliss; their cry therein, "Glory to Thee, O God," their greeting, "Peace," and their cry ends, "Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being."*[539]

Paradise is the realm of purity and sanctity, and Hell is the abode of impurity, pollution, and contamination. For this reason, Paradise and its gates, levels, custodians, and inhabitants are all pure. There are no evil deeds, vain talk, impure intention, or mean and lowly traits, and "I-ness" (*anānīyah*) and pride do not exist there. Nor is there any sign of polytheism, hypocrisy, falsehood, and duality present. All there is, is praise of God, prayer and remembrance, longing to meet the Lord, happiness and joy, and love and friendship.

The main conditions for entering this realm are standing hardships and experiencing suffering in this world and struggling to attain perfection, standing the torment of death, and in short, going through any process that is necessary for purification of the human soul.

Similarly, Hell also provide a chance for cleansing and purification of those who are not doomed to stay there eternally, those who could earn God's forgiveness and follow the path of *wilāyah* and receive intercession.

How noble it is to hear the inhabitants of Paradise constantly recite *their cry therein, "Glory to Thee, O God," their greeting, "Peace," and their last utterance would be, "Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being."*[540] Those who attain the true station of gnosis traverse in Divine Names and Attributes,

[539] Qur'an, 10: 9–10
[540] Qur'an, 10: 10

and see His light in all manifestations of life. They see the entire universe as a reflection of His light. The best gift that these servants of God can be rewarded with is indeed purity of their utterance that God loves: *And they shall say, "Praise belongs to God who has put away all sorrow from us. Surely our Lord is All-forgiving, All-thankful, who of His grace has made us to dwell in the abode of everlasting life wherein no weariness assails us neither fatigue."*[541]

The act of praising the Lord and attributing to Him the removal of hardship and sorrow and settling the righteous in Paradise, all are indicative of their achieving the station of union and attaining perfect knowledge of the Divine. For this is the realm where hardship and suffering, sorrow or sickness, have no place: *But the godfearing shall be amidst gardens and fountains: "Enter you them, in peace and security!" We shall strip away all rancour that is in their breasts; as brothers they shall be upon couches set face to face; no fatigue there shall smite them, neither shall they ever be driven forth from there.*[542]

Thus, the inhabitants of Paradise are eternally preoccupied with God for they have reached the abode of peace (*Dār al-salām*) and for them, *Peace!—such is the greeting, from a Lord All-compassionate.*[543] In such a station which is the abode of peace, God is their Protector in whatever they do.[544]

One of the Most Beautiful Names (*Asmā' al-Ḥusnā*) is Salām (Peace). It denotes that God is a Being in Whose presence fear, limitation, sorrow, or any other difficulty that belongs to the realm of the human being has no place. When man enters Paradise, all these qualities associated with that particular Divine Name are already inculcated in his soul and he becomes the embodiment of eternal peace (*Salām*).

In addition, another meaning of *Salām* is well-being in the sense that it denotes a state that is free of all illness, pain,

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541 Qur'an, 35: 33–35

542 Qur'an, 15: 45–48

543 Qur'an, 36: 55–58

544 Qur'an, 6: 127, *He is their Protector for that they were doing.*
وَ هُوَ وَلِيُّهُم بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

harms, and trouble. That is the reason why in old times when a man became sick, they recited *Yā Salām* for a certain number of times and by God's Will he overcame sickness and regained his health. The inhabitants of Paradise embody all these qualities. Therefore, when Muslims greet one another by saying *Salām-u 'Alaikum,* they are not simply reciting a phrase for greeting, but rather are speaking of a state of being. *Salām* also embodies in its meaning a state of purity: *Peace be upon you! You are pure so enter [in paradise] to dwell forever.*[545] This is the abode of purity, where spouses are also pure and God is pleased with them,[546] and where they hear no vain talk and recrimination, except "Peace, Peace!"[547] In short, God protects the inhabitants of Paradise from any kind of imaginable imperfections and assures that they do not have any fear or sorrow. Here is where the religion of Islam, that is, the religion of surrender and peace, will prevail.

God says in the Qur'an, *The true religion with God is Islam*[548] and *Whoso desires another religion than Islam, it shall not be accepted of him; in the next world he shall be among the losers.*[549] By virtue of its finality Islam is the most perfect religion and includes in itself all commands and injunctions of other religions. Some may argue that according to the Qur'an *There is no compulsion in religion*[550] and people are free to choose any religion they wish. In response to this argument, it is our opinion that the above verse addresses a state of the heart of the people in the sense that it considers religion to be a personal matter and does not pertain to the domain of morality, social relations, the law, and practical commands of religion. We believe that when Islam appeared, it abrogated all previous religions, and the word *Islam* in the above verse refers specifically to the religion we know as Islam, and not in its universal meaning, that is, surrendering.

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[545] Qur'an, 39: 73
[546] Qur'an, 3: 15
[547] Qur'an, 56: 25–26
[548] Qur'an, 3: 19
[549] Qur'an, 3: 85
[550] Qur'an, 2: 256

There are verses in the Qur'an that speak of believers and the righteous and those who do good deeds. In most such cases believers are meant to be those early Muslims who accepted the religion that the Prophet brought for them,[551] *...those who believe and do righteous deeds and believe in what is sent down to Muhammad—and it is the truth from their Lord—He will acquit them of their evil deeds, and dispose their minds aright.*[552]

That is the reason the Qur'an invites the People of the Book to accept the new religion of Islam. *Had the People of the Book believed, it were better for them; some of them are believers, but the most of them are ungodly*[553] and *But had the People of the Book believed and been godfearing, We would have acquitted them of their evil deeds, and admitted them to Gardens of Bliss.*[554]

If these verses intended to address *Islam* in it universal meaning, they would have not asked the People of the Book to enter Islam so that they could enter Paradise. Moreover, even merely entering Islam would not suffice to guarantee one's salvation and admission to Paradise. Rather, it is the harmony between one's deeds and true faith that alone is important: *Surely they that believe, and those of Jewry, and the Sabaeans, and those Christians, whosoever believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness—no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow.*[555]

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[551] Other scholars do not support the idea that other religions were abrogated when Islam appeared. They argue that as long as followers of other religions are sincere, observe the commands of their religions, do good deeds, and are righteous, they will be saved. See for example Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. II, pp. 147–48; vol. V, pp. 573; vol. VII, p. 478. See also Ayatullāh Khomeini, *al-Makāsib*, Qom, 1381, pp. 133–34; Muṭahhari, *Wahy va Nubuwwat*, pp. 39 and 49; Ayatullāh Ḥossein 'Ali Montaẓeri, *Islam: Dīn-i Fitrat*, pp. 64–67; and Mahmoud Ayub, "World Religions from the Perspective of the Qur'an," lecture delivered at Belmond University in Tripoli, Lebanon, A Persian translation appeared in *Payeez*, # 31, Qom.

[552] Qur'an, 47: 2

[553] Qur'an, 3: 110

[554] Qur'an, 5: 65

[555] Qur'an, 5: 69

As these two verses clearly explain, it is the true and sincere faith that saves one on the Day of Judgment. Merely calling oneself a believing Muslim, Jew, Christian, Sabian, or member of any other religion is not a criterion for deliverance.

Having said all that, along with the fact that Muslims believe their religion provides the straight path to salvation, logically and intellectually all human beings must accept Islam and be saved. However, it may happen that a person reaches certainty that the religion of Moses or Jesus suffices him for salvation, truly believes in God and the Day of Judgment, and observes the commands of his religion. Such a person would be among those who hope for God's mercy and will not be questioned on why he failed to enter Islam. He will be saved.

As far as Muslims who follow other branches of Islam, as long as they do not hate the Ahl al-Bayt and have no grudge against them, and the legitimacy and station of Imām 'Ali is not proven to them, they will also enter Paradise from the eighth gate. In many verses of the Qur'an conditions that one meets to qualify for Paradise are *But as for him who feared the station of his Lord and forbade the soul its caprice, surely Paradise shall be the refuge*[556] *and the day when neither wealth nor sons shall profit except for him who comes to God with a pure heart.*[557]

A pure heart only belongs to Paradise where the *ṭūbā* tree, the tree of purity, is located. The tree and its many branches symbolize various manifestations of purity and sanctity. The root of this tree is in the realm of *wilāyah*. Some commentators, including Abū Baṣīr, have cited the following *ḥadīth* on the authority of Imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim:

> The Prophet was asked about *ṭūbā*. He said, "It is a tree whose origin is in my house and each branch of it is in the house of a believer."
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> Then somebody asked him one more time and he said, "In the house of 'Ali."

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[556] Qur'an, 79: 40–41
[557] Qur'an, 26: 88–89

When they asked him why his two responses to the same question were different, he said, "My house and 'Ali's are one in Paradise, in the same location."[558]

One of the stations of the inhabitants of Paradise is the station of contentment (*riḍā*), where God is pleased with them and they are pleased with God. We must mention, however, that what we mean by this term is not engendered contentment (*riḍāyat takwīnī*), because God must have been pleased with all His creatures that He created. Otherwise, He would not have created them. What we intend here is the *riḍāyat tashri'ī*, that is, man's pleasure with man in terms of observing the laws and commands of His religion and being content with whatever God ordains for him. In this station a believer never complains of what God ordains and considers all that which comes to him from God good. Those are *the Foremost, the first of the Emigrants and the Helpers, and those who followed them in good-doing—God will be well-pleased with them and they are well-pleased with Him.*[559]

As we mentioned before, Paradise has hierarchical levels. Since it is the realm of detachment and unboundedness (*iṭlāq*), all souls *shall have whatsoever they will with their Lord; that is the recompense of the good-doers.*[560] In consideration with its perfection, each soul is sealed eternally in that which it desires, and therefore no longer has a chance to ascend to higher stations. If a soul desires *hawrīs*, palaces, and pleasures and does not wish to see the face of the Beloved, it will remain in that station and will never be able to immerse itself in the endless beauty of the Beloved. There are, however, certain things that God has set

[558] *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. III, Ṣeida edition, p. 291
[559] Qur'an, 9: 100. This part of the verse is repeated four times in the Qur'an: *God will be well-pleased with them and they are well-pleased with Him.* See 5: 119, 9: 100, 58: 22, and 98: 8.
[560] Qur'an, 39: 34

aside for His special servants such that *No soul knows what comfort is laid up for them secretly, as a recompense for that they were doing.*[561]

According to Imām Ṣādiq, God assigned a reward for every good deed except for night vigil because of the exalted place it has in man's life. God created a special Heaven as the reward for those who perform night vigil.[562] Perhaps we can say that anything that would not be contained in the human mind and imagination cannot be anything but the manifestation of God's power and the beauty of His Countenance. *So let him, who hopes for the encounter with his Lord, work righteousness, and not associate with his Lord's service anyone.*[563] *Upon that day faces shall be radiant, gazing upon their Lord; and upon that day faces shall be scowling.*[564] Indeed, this is that hidden reward that cannot be contained in human imagination and is more precious than any perfection man can attain. If we read the above verses in light of several others, especially 24: 38, 2: 105, 24: 21, 7: 156, 7: 49, and 13: 28, they lead us to the conclusion that indeed God's mercy is His Paradise, or better said, Paradise is one of the applications of Divine mercy. Once one's eyes open to His Countenance, His lovers will never see other than Him, immersed in His mercy and intoxicated by the endless theophany of His Beauty and Majesty, for He said, "I am the Companion of him who remembers Me" ;[565] and that is how it is when hearts attain true certainty.

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[561] Qur'an, 32: 17
[562] 'Ali ibn Ibrāhīm Qomi, *Tafsīr*, lithograph edition pp. 512–13. Ḥurūfī edition, pp. 169–70, Najaf, n.d.
[563] Qur'an, 18: 110
[564] Qur'an, 75: 22–23
[565] *ḥadīth qudsī*

أنا جليس من
ذكرني

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Seventieth Discourse

The Hierarchy in Paradise and Their Bounties

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *This is a Remembrance; and for the godfearing is a fair resort, Gardens of Eden, whereof the gates are open to them, wherein they recline, and wherein they call for fruits abundant, and sweet potions, and with them maidens restraining their glances of equal age.*[566]

The reality or Paradise is *wilāyah*, the essence of which is nothing but absolute obedience and servanthood to God. This is a station where existentially there is no veil between master and servant. God sits on the majestic throne of power, knowledge, wisdom, life, and command, and His servant is immersed in poverty, ignorance, and helplessness, prostrating before the forgiving, merciful, and loving Lord. All bounties that exist in the universe originate from this source of *wilāyah* and as a result of expressing obedience and appealing to His Names and Attributes. These Attributes manifest themselves in accordance with the specific conditions of each realm, be it this world, the intermediate world, or in the Hereafter.

To know the majestic being of God, exalted is He, and annihilation of all kinds of identity and "I"ness (*anānīyah*) in His being, traveling through stations of the Unity in deeds (*tawḥīd-i af'āl*), in Names (*tawḥīd-i asmā'*), in Attributes (*tawḥīd-i ṣifātī*), and in Unity in Essence (*tawḥīd-i dhātī*) constitute the highest plane of Paradise. Any stations below these indeed constitute the lower planes of Paradise. Obviously, in the world of existence love is not spread to all in an equal manner; rather, each existent thing has a share in accordance with its quality and capacity. When we say that the reality of Paradise is *wilāyah* and love emanates from it, it means that love manifests itself in proportion to the capacity of its loci of manifestation

[566] Qur'an, 49–54

and in different forms and shapes, the creation of the world of Kingdom (*mulk*) and Dominion (*malakūt*). It is not an exaggeration to say that wherever there is more love, then purity, sincerity, generosity, and obedience are stronger. The opposite is also true. Therefore, we can consider love the foundation of the creation of the universe, as the Qur'an says, *God will assuredly bring a people He loves, and who love Him...*[567]

Therefore, we can take love as the foundation for creation of the universe. From Him who loves, those who love Him originate, and Divine attraction and the resulting love by His servants causes the creation of the world. Thus, man is created by God and shall return to Him, and the righteous one shall have a good return. The Noble Prophet is the center of the inner and hidden dimension of *wilāyah*, and 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib is the outward manifestation of this station. There are many sound traditions and narrations that support this principle and indicate that Paradise with all its qualities and levels originates from and indeed belongs to *wilāyah*, and people benefit from that in accordance with their devotion to *wilāyah*. It is narrated that the Prophet once said, "Once I entered Paradise and saw at its gate written with gold, 'There is no god but God, Muhammad is His beloved, and 'Ali is His Friend, Fāṭimah is His servant, and Ḥassan and Ḥusayn are God's pure and chosen servants,'"[568] and, "Muhammad's residence in Paradise is in the Garden of Eden. That garden is the closest to the Divine throne, Compassionate and Majestic is He. Those who are in the company of Muhammad are the 12 Imāms."[569]

As to the blessings and bounties in Paradise the Qur'an speaks of beautiful, wide, lovely eyes (*ḥaur al-'ayn*) with whom man will become intimate: *and We shall espouse them to wide-eyed hawrīs.*[570] A narration on the authority of Imām

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[567] Qur'an, 5: 54

[568] *Kitāb al-Khiṣāl*, Lithograph edition, vol. I, p. 157

[569] Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Ikmāl al-Dīn*, Lithograph edition, vol. III, chapter 26, p. 173

[570] Qur'an, 44: 54

Ṣādiq reveals that "In Paradise man enjoys nothing more than intimacy [with *ḥaur al-'ayn*] and drinking [paradisal] wine."[571]

We can find the description of Paradise in more details in two chapters of the Qur'an; one is chapter 55, the only chapter that immediately after the opening starts with the beautiful name al-Raḥmān. It is narrated that the Prophet said, "Everything has its own bride, and the bride of the Qur'an is chapter "*al-Raḥmān*."[572] The other one is chapter 56 ("*al-Wāqi'ah*, The Event"). We will examine these chapters and comment on them in the coming pages.

First, chapter 55: 46: *But for him who fears the standing before his Lord there are two gardens.* For those whose prayers are for God alone, and out of fear of Hell or hope of Paradise, there will be two gardens. One is the reward for their deeds, and the other is God's promise when He said, *Of spreading branches,*[573] and, *And there they have all desire, and there is more with us.*[574]

The Qur'an's description of this level of Paradise is clear and vivid, and it would be best to present the relevant verses (50–76), followed by brief comments on them:

> *...therein two fountains of running water,*
> *therein of every fruit two kinds, reclining upon couches lined with brocade,*
> *the fruits of the gardens nigh to gather—*
> *therein maidens restraining their glances,*
> *untouched before them by any man or jinn,*
> *lovely as rubies, beautiful as coral*
> *Shall the recompense of goodness be other than goodness?*

The first and highest plane of Paradise belongs to those who worshiped God for His own sake and out of awe and devotion. Obviously they were among those who were purified

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[571] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. VIII, p. 139
[572] Ṭabāṭabā'ī. *al-Mīzān*, vol. IX, p. 105
[573] Qur'an, 55: 48
[574] Qur'an, 50: 35

by God (*mukhlaṣīn*)and those who were brought nigh to Him (*muqarrabīn*).

Below that level of Paradise, then there are two other gardens, similar to the first, yet lower in rank. These two gardens belong to the People of the Right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*) whose worship might be out of the fear of Hell or desire for Paradise. One is the reward for their deeds and the other out of God's mercy and generosity toward them,

> *And besides these shall be two gardens, green, green pastures,*
> *green, green pastures,*
> *therein two fountains of gushing water,*
> *therein fruits, and palm-trees, and pomegranates,*
> *therein maidens good and comely,*
> *hawrīs, cloistered in cool pavilions,*
> *untouched before them by any man or jinn,*
> *reclining upon green cushions and lovely druggets.*
> *O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?*
> *Blessed be the Name of thy Lord, majestic, splendid.*

The second is chapter 56 ("*al-Wāqi'ah*"), which divides people into three categories. First the foremost (*al-sābiqūn*), then those on the right hand (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*), and finally those on the left.

The first group is those who are in constant pursuit of good deeds. They are those who are brought nigh to God, and their abode is in the Garden of Delight. As we will explain, the Garden of Delight is indeed the Paradise of *wilāyah.* Most of the foremost are from old and fewer from later times. The latter *umma* in fact refers to the community of the Seal of the Prophets (Muhammad) and there will be few of them among the foremost. However, many of them will be among the People of the Right who, *upon close-wrought couches, reclining upon them, set face to face, immortal youths going round about them goblets, and ewers, and a cup from a spring no brows throbbing, no intoxication...*[575] *and such fruits as they shall choose, and such flesh of fowl as they desire, and wide-eyed hawrīs as the*

[575] Qur'an, 56: 11–19

likeness of hidden pearls, a recompense for that they labored.[576]

These are all the rewards that the People of the Right will receive in Paradise for what they did in the world. Their abode is *among gardens and rivers... Firmly established in the favor of the Mighty King.*[577] Their position in Paradise is explained further in chapter 78 and 98: *Surely for the godfearing awaits a place of security, gardens and vineyards and maidens with swelling breasts, like of age, and a cup overflowing. Therein they shall hear no idle talk, no cry of lies, for a recompense from thy Lord, a gift, a reckoning, Lord of the heavens and earth, and all that between them is, the All-merciful of whom they have no power to speak.* They hear no vain speaking, nor recrimination, except the saying "peace and peace,"[578] and *But those who believe, and do righteous deeds, those are the best of creatures; their recompense is with their Lord—Gardens of Eden, underneath which rivers flow, therein dwelling for ever and ever. God is well-pleased with them, and they are well-pleased with Him; that is for him who fears his Lord.*[579]

Thus, the Hereafter is a resting place for the pious and the godfearing, and Paradise is the station of sincerity, piety, and contentment. It is where God's power and majesty is experienced, where falsehood, lies, and sins are absent. The pure wine (*sharāban ṭahūra*) intoxicates men but does not take away their intellect. It immerses them in God's Beauty and His Attributes. Paradisal food does not cause indigestion, intimacy does not lead to exhaustion; all there exists is love, joy, happiness, and goodness. This is because, in contrast to this world, there is no flaw or imperfection in Paradise. Therefore all pleasures and happiness are eternal. Imperfection and shortcoming belongs to our world, which is the world of matter. Paradise is truly the realm of perfection and beauty. It is narrated in a *ḥadīth* that the inhabitants of Paradise might have died at

[576] Qur'an, 56: 20–26
[577] Qur'an, 54: 54–55
[578] Qur'an, 78: 31–36 and 56: 25–26
[579] Qur'an, 98: 7–8

an old age, yet all look very young and do not even have facial hair.[580]

One day the Prophet was talking about the peculiarities of Paradise and said that old women will not enter Paradise. There was an old woman in his presence who, upon hearing this statement, began to cry. The Prophet asked her not to cry because no matter how old they die, they will enter into Paradise as young girls by God's Will, where they will remain eternally young, enjoying the bounties of Paradise forever: *The likeness of Paradise, that is promised to the godfearing: beneath it rivers flow, its produce is eternal, and its shade. That is the requital of the god-fearing; and the requital of the unbelievers is—the Fire!*[581]

It is reported on the authority of Imām 'Ali that the Prophet talked about a bazaar in Paradise where no transaction takes place except over human facial form. Men and women can choose any kind of facial features to which they are attracted. This is where wide-eyed *hawrīs* (*ḥaur al-'ayn*) congregate and sing in such beautiful voices that no human being has heard before:

> We are eternally happy and joyous, never sad or sorrowful. We are never hungry, always covered with [beautiful] dress and never naked, we have eternal life and never die. We are always happy and never get angry. We are eternally settled here and never leave this place. Happy are those whom we are for. We are noble and beautiful women. Our husbands are also noble.[582]

There is no rational or religious reason to doubt that paradisal bounties are not eternal because Paradise is the realm of matter where imperfections abound. There is no change or transformation or corruption possible there. It is the abode of fixed entities; therefore, material factors or accidents cannot

[580] The terms *jurd* and *murd* both denote youth and refer to young men and women who have not developed bodily or facial hair and beards yet.
[581] Qur'an, 13: 35
[582] *Jāmi ' al-Akhbār*, lithograph edition, *chapter* 137, p. 202

diminish or stop joy and pleasure. Neither is there sickness or death that could put an end to it. There are many verses in the Qur'an that support this argument: *But those who fear their Lord—for them shall be gardens underneath which rivers flow, therein dwelling forever—a hospitality God Himself offers; and that which is with God is better for the pious,*[583] and *Those who believe, and have emigrated, and have struggled in the way of God with their possessions and their selves are mightier in rank with God; and those—they are the triumphant; their Lord gives them good tidings of mercy from Him and good pleasure; for them await gardens wherein is lasting bliss, therein to dwell forever and ever; surely with God is a mighty wage.*[584]

That is the reason all levels of Paradise are called the Eternal Paradise (*jannt'ul-khuld*): *Say: "Is that better, or the Garden of Eternity, that is promised to the godfearing, and is their recompense and homecoming?" Therein they shall have what they will dwelling forever; it is a promise binding upon thy Lord, and of Him to be required.*[585]

It must be mentioned that the different levels of Paradise mentioned in the Qur'an are four kinds. They are the Garden of Eden, the Garden of *Ferdous*, the Garden of Delight (*Jannat al-Na'īm*), and the Garden of Retreat (*Jannat al-Mawā'*) each described in numerous verses and commented upon in a narration attributed to Imām Bāqir. According to him these four levels of Paradise each contain gardens within them.[586] In short, The Eternal Paradise (*Jannat al-Khuld*) encompasses all others and the Garden of Delight denotes the abode of *wilāyah*. The Garden of Meeting the Lord (*Jannat–Liqā'*) is where God has promised man will see His countenance on the Day of Judgment. *Upon that day faces shall be radiant, gazing upon their Lord; and upon that day faces shall be scowling.*[587] On more

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[583] Qur'an, 3: 198
[584] Qur'an, 9: 20–22
[585] Qur'an, 25: 15–16
[586] Qur'an, 56: 10–12; 70: 38–39; 61: 12; 18: 107–8; 23: 10–11; 23: 19; and 53: 15. See also, Fayḍ Kāshānī, *'Ilm al-Yaqīn*, Lithograph edition, pp. 224.
[587] Qur'an, 75: 22–24

than twenty occasion in the Qur'an God has made this promise, and *Whoever hoped for the encounter with His Lord, let him do righteous work and not associate with his Lord's service anyone.*[588] This Garden is God's special garden when He says, *O Soul at peace! Return unto thy Lord, well pleased, well pleasing. Enter thou among My bondsmen! Enter thou My Paradise.*[589]

There are also some levels of Paradise that have been identified as the Abode or the House (*Dār*), as *Theirs is the abode of peace with their Lord, and He is their Protector for that they were doing.*[590]

One of the most important stations in the spiritual journey is the station of annihilation in God (*fanā' fi 'llāh*). It is in this station that God promises the Garden of Essence (*Jannat al-Dhāt*). Some observers believe that since Paradise has eight gates there must exist only eight Paradises. This argument is not valid, for a house could have more than one gate to enter. Moreover, the eightfold gate could all belong to one Paradise only. There are some narrations that indicate Paradise has more than seventy thousand gates, which denotes a large number of gates.

In his celebrated book (*al-Manāqib*), Ibn Shahr Āshūb states that according to Imām 'Ali, Paradise has 71 gates. He and his progeny and followers enter through 70 of those gates, and the rest of the people through the remaining one gate.[591] Some gates have names such as Bāb al-Ma'rūf and Bāb al-Mujahidīn and are recorded in the books of *ḥadīth*. The Commander of the Faithful once said, "Paradise has different levels and some are superior to others. Its bounties will never diminish, and he who settles there will never leave, will never get old, and will never fall in need of anyone."[592] How eloquently the saying of the sages relates to this discussion that "There are

588 Qur'an, 18: 110
589 Qur'an, 89: 27–30
590 Qur'an, 6: 127
591 As quoted in *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 8, p. 139
592 *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon #83 (Abduh ed.), Cairo, p. 139

as many paths to God as the number of human beings." In other words, every human being journeys toward God in accordance with the constitution of his soul, and therefore walks on his own path and has his own place in Paradise; hence the multiplicity of the levels and ranks of Paradise. The Prophet said, "The center of Paradise is for me and my Household."[593]

There are some other narrations that describe the place of members of the Ahl al-Bayt and the righteous Shī'a who are believed to enter Paradise. According to Imām Ṣādiq, the Prophet said, "Indeed, God, Most High, placed a column made of red ruby upon which is built seventy thousand palaces, and in each palace there are seventy thousand rooms and pavilions. God created these for those who are kind to each other for God's sake, and their hearts meet in God."[594]

Every good deed is, in a sense, a gate to Paradise, as every evil act is a gate to Hell. Therefore, there are many roads to Heaven and Hell both. The use of the number 8 or 71 one is a metaphor to denote the multiplicity of the road to and gates for Paradise. Again, Imām Ṣādiq recorded a statement of the Prophet who said,

> Indeed, generosity is a tree among many trees of Paradise. Its branches are extended to the world. He who is generous clings to one of those branches of the tree that will connect him to Paradise. Similarly, jealousy and stinginess is a tree among the trees of Hell. He who is stingy and jealous clings to one of those branches of the tree that will connect him to Hell.[595]

Among the best and most virtuous deeds is recitation of the Qur'an and night vigil, which open a special station in Paradise for righteous servants. We should also mention that Paradise on the Day of Judgment is a formal and physical entity where the *hawrīs*, youths, trees, and fruits are in abundance. When we say that Paradise of Resurrection is the rising of the threefold worlds of nature, soul, and archetype, where man is annihilated

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[593] *'Uyūn al-Akhbār al-Riḍā*, p. 257
[594] As quoted in *Biḥār al-Anwār,* vol. VIII, p. 132
[595] Ṭūsi, *Āmālī,* Lithograph ed., chapter 17, p. 302

in God and where nothing else exists except God, all peculiarities of these realms are in their own proper place. However, Paradise is attained in subsistence after annihilation (*baqā' ba'd al-fanā'*) where all theophanies of the soul will not be in conflict with the realm of form and the worlds of forms and nature. Without doubt in moving toward God and actualization of the Qur'anic injunctions ("to God we belong and to Him shall we return, *innā li'lLāh wa innā ilayhi rāji'ūn*")[596] the human soul goes through the worlds of form and archetype, and only then does it attain annihilation in God on the day that the Kingdom belongs to God, the One, the Omnipotent, and each soul shall be recompensed for that it has earned: "*Whose is the Kingdom today?" "God's, the One, the Omnipotent. Today each soul shall be recompensed for that it has earned; no wrong today.*"[597]

Here is where everything is annihilated and no names, forms, punishments, or rewards, no human beings, animals, or *jinn*, angels, or prophets exist. Even the spirit of the angel of death (*malak al-mawt*) is taken by God's command. Then all these beings find subsistence in God where faculties and qualities appear in them again. Once more reckoning, rewards and punishments, Heaven and Hell, and all other peculiarities appear. Here all beings subsist in God; this is the rising of the world of spirit: *And so We have revealed to thee an Arabic Koran, that thou mayest warn the Mother of Cities and those who dwell about it, and that thou mayest warn of the Day of Gathering, wherein is no doubt—a party in Paradise, and a party in the Blaze.*[598]

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[596] Qur'an, 2: 156
[597] Qur'an, 40: 16–17
[598] Qur'an, 42: 7

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Seventy-First Discourse

Hell and Its Origins

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *Then the unbelievers shall be driven in companies into Gehenna till, when they have come thither, then its gates will be opened and its keepers will say to them, "Did not Messengers come to you from among yourselves, reciting to you the signs of your Lord and warning you against the encounter of this your day?" They shall say, "Yes indeed; but the word of the chastisement has been realized against the unbelievers." It shall be said, "Enter the gates of Gehenna, to dwell therein forever." How evil is the lodging of those that are proud!*[599]

His Holiness, the Master of Gnostics 'Ali ibn Ḥusayn (Zayn al-'Ābidīn Sajjād), recited the following supplication after he performed night prayer:

O God! I seek refuge in Thee *from the fire*,
through which Thou art harsh toward him who disobeys Thee,
and by which Thou hast threatened
him who turns away from Thy good pleasure,
from the fire whose light is darkness
whose ease is pain,
and whose far is near,
from the fire, part of which devours parts
and parts of which leap upon parts,
from the fire which
leaves bones decayed,
and lets it people drink boiling water;
from the fire which "does not spare him who pleads to it"[600]
has no mercy on him who seeks sympathy from it,
and has no power to relieve him
who humbled himself before it

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[599] Qur'an, 39: 71–72
[600] This part is a *ḥadīth*.

and yields himself to it;
it meets its inhabitants with the hottest that it possesses;
painful punishment and intense noxiousness
I seek refuge in Thee
from its gaping-jawed scorpions,
Its scraping-toothed serpents,
and its drinks, which tear apart the intestines and hearts of its inhabitants and root out their marrow,
I ask guidance from Thee,
to that which will keep far from it
And make it retreat!
O God! Bless Muhammad and his Household,
Grant me sanctuary from it through the bounty of Thy mercy,
Release me from my stumbles through Thy good releasing, and abandon me not,
O Best of the sanctuary-granters,
O God! Thou protectest from the disliked,
Givest the good,
Dost what Thou wilt
and Thou art powerful over everything.[601]

As 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī has mentioned, there are more verses about Hell in the Qur'an than verses on Paradise. There are indeed around 400 verses that deal with Hell. Except for in 12 of the shorter chapters there is an allusion to Hell in all other chapters in one way or another, directly or indirectly. Their overall message is that the inhabitants of Hell are eternally deprived of true life in the Hereafter. The question is why they have been deprived. More basic questions are what is Hell itself? How does it appear? What is its origin? Why is it that Hell is represented as fire in its reality in the realm of the Hereafter? To address all these questions, a few introductory remarks are necessary.

[601] Qur'an, 3: 26. This is part of supplication number 32. Translation of this supplication is taken from William Chittick. See *The Psalms of Islam: al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Kāmilat al-Sajjādiyya*, translated by William Chittick, London: Muhammadi Trust, 1988, pp. 117–18.

The entire universe and created world is a locus of theophany of God, Most High. He has created them all from nothing and has adorned them with the robe of existence.

Each being has its own unique characteristics and features that are peculiar to it alone and set it apart from other beings. Each being also has a hierarchical relationship with other beings and each in its own way is a sign and manifestation of God. For example, human beings possesses characteristics that set them apart from animals and plants, from disengaged intellects (*'uqūl mufāriqah*), or from detached sacred souls. Otherwise, they would not be a human beings. Similarly, all other beings also are unique to their own kind. Otherwise, the entire universe would be merely a simple (*baht*) being. These different *quidities* that define the hierarchy of beings in the world of existence become the distinctive nature of each being, which, each in its own way, manifests divine presence. Each in its own way is obedient and fixed within the limits set for it. Each being is content and surrendered in obedience to God's engendering command. All are established in their own essence and existence and fixed behind the veil of their quidities.

In addition to their nature and peculiar characteristics that human beings and the *jinn* have, they also possess one specific trait that separates them from all other beings, and that is their inclination to claim independence, arrogance, and personal identity. This trait that is stronger in human being than in *jinn*, causes man to feel superior to all other beings and claim qualities such as knowledge and power that he does not possess. As a result man forgets God and tends to consider himself the center of the universe. He claims that he is in fact the source of all these qualities, and therefore forgets God. This is the greatest veil because it is not true. It is a veil created by illusion and imagination because human beings like all other beings have been given these qualities by God, and their claim for independent existence and possession of these qualities is false.

God created Satan and gave him the attribute of pride and arrogance. Man acquires these qualities by obeying Satan and following his path. As a result a sense of grandiosity developed in his soul. It became the source and cause of all illusive

thoughts and corrupt claims and behavior and, in short, all evil habits and ideas. Hence man falls increasingly distanced from God despite all rules of religion and creation. Of course, the creation of Satan was based on Divine prudence. Otherwise, God would have not created him. Indeed, Satan acts like an inspector. Those people of good deed will remain immune from his temptations and enter Divine sanctuary, as the Qur'an says: *Said he, "My Lord, respite me till the day they shall be raised." Said He, "Thou art among the ones that are respited until the day of the known time." Said he, "Now, by Thy glory, I shall pervert them all together, excepting those Thy servants among them that are sincere."*[602]

Those who are proud and arrogant and claim to possess attributes that in reality belong to God alone, Satan will prevent them from entering into God's sacred sanctuary. If Satan did not exist, the world of descent and nature would not exist, because it was Satan who deceived Adam and Eve and caused their fall from Heaven. They lived in Heaven before the fall, in the abode of Dharr,[603] which was the realm of all possibilities, where man like angels was perfect and possessed all perfections. Satan caused man's fall to this world. Then his struggle to regain what he had lost started. As a result he began to move from the station of the lowest of the low (*asfal al-sāfilīn*) to that of the Higher Plenum (*a'lā 'illiyīn*) to attain a higher station than the angels. One can say that all these virtues and achievements in a sense were the by-product of the creation of Satan by God. Even though Satan is cursed and is a veil, he should not be considered a being independent of God in his deeds. Such an illusion is identical with polytheism.

God created man and granted him the quality of free will. Satan deceives all human beings and urges them to commit sins and do evil in order to differentiate between those who are pious and steadfast and strive for perfection, and those who are

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602 Qur'an, 38: 80–83

603 The abode of Dharr is believed to be the realm of spirit. Some identify it with the world of the fetus, others with that of children born of Adam. On this issue see Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol. VIII, pp. 320–33.

after fulfilling their desires and appetite. *[B]ut that God might determine a matter that was done, that whosoever perished might perish by a clear sign, and by a clear sign he might live who lived; and surely God is All-hearing, All-knowing.*[604] Otherwise, it would have been impossible to distinguish good from evil, and all men could claim sainthood and independence from God. Such proud human beings who claim to possess Divine qualities and feel superior to all, must suffer and burn in Hell. Who else other than God Himself can claim independence of existence? The Qur'an also makes it clear that the place of such human beings is only Hell: *How evil is the lodging of those that are proud!*[605]

Satan did not obey God's command and refused to prostrate before Adam, because he was proud, whereas all other angels obeyed God's command: *And when We said to the angels, "Bow yourselves to Adam," so they bowed themselves, save Iblis; he refused, and waxed proud, and so he became one of the unbelievers.*[606]

This attitude of Satan in fact caused his fall from Heaven: *Said He, "Get thee down out of it; it is not for thee to wax proud here, so go thou forth; surely thou art among the humbled." Said he, "Respite me till the day they shall be raised." Said He, "Thou art among the ones that are respited."*[607]

It is this very pride and arrogance that keeps human beings away from Paradise and distances them from God and takes them to Hell. It lures them to attach themselves to contingencies and illusions. This selfish attitude blinds them to the truth and drowns them in such deep illusions and imagination that they see no other reality in the world except their own. They despise God's messengers and do not observe His commands: *And We gave to Moses the Book, and after him sent succeeding Messengers; and We gave Jesus son of Mary the clear signs, and confirmed him with the Holy Spirit; and whensoever there*

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[604] Qur'an, 8: 42
[605] Qur'an, 39: 71–72
[606] Qur'an, 2: 34 and 38: 74
[607] Qur'an, 7: 12–13

came to you a Messenger with that your souls had not desire for, did you become arrogant, and some cry lies to, and some slay?[608]

In contrast God praises those who obey Him and ceaselessly worship Him as He praised the Christians (*naṣarā*): *and thou wilt surely find the nearest of them in love to the believers are those who say "We are Christians"; that, because some of them are priests and monks, and they wax not proud.*[609]

In short, this sense of grandiosity, self-centeredness, and rebellious attitude in man in not an aspect of his primordial nature but emanates from the carnal soul and the thick veil created between man and God as a result of Satan's temptation and his effort to make evil things and deeds look deceivingly good (*taswīl*). Since Satan is created out of fire, this veil will be like fire. He who is covered by this veil will be united with Satan and consumed by fire. On the Day of Judgment this veil will appear in the form of fire where man will eternally reside and will be punished forever. *And upon the Day of Resurrection thou shalt see those who lied against God, their faces blackened; is there not in Gehenna a lodging for those that are proud?*[610] and *Surely those who wax too proud to do Me service shall enter Gehenna utterly abject.*[611]

All sins, trespassing, violating people's honor and dignity, murdering the innocent, and taking away people's property, all are the result of arrogance and pride, which prevents man from surrendering to God, pushes him to corruption and falsehood, and gradually blinds his eyes and closes his heart to the truth. *[A]nd when it is said to him, "Fear God," vainglory seizes him in his sin. So Gehenna shall be enough for him—how evil a cradling!*[612]

The most visible outcome of arrogance and pride is polytheism (*shirk*), that is, assuming independent existence for any

608 Qur'an, 2: 87
609 Qur'an, 5: 82
610 Qur'an, 39: 60
611 Qur'an, 40: 60
612 Qur'an, 2: 205

thing other than God. What sin could be greater than assuming independence for anything before the illuminating power of God Who has given existence to all things, extended His mercy over them, and continuously nurtures them with knowledge, power, and life? Therefore, wherever there is pride, there will be polytheism. Only its extent and scope will vary from place to place or time to time; it manifests itself in some people and is hidden in some, but most people are in fact inflicted with hidden polytheism to one degree or the other. But God is Great and Majestic, and any kind of majesty in creation is the rays of the sun of His Majesty. Only He can claim true majesty and power. *He is God; there is no god but He. He is the King, the All-holy, the All-peaceable, the All-faithful, the All-preserver, the All-mighty, the All-compeller, the All-sublime. Glory be to God, above that they associate!*[613]

Indeed, how excellent it is to call man's attention to God's Glory and Majesty (*Allāh-u Akbar*), a call that attributes to Him alone all greatness, majesty, and pride, for He is greater than anything that can be described: *O thou shrouded in thy mantle, arise, and warn! Thy Lord magnify thy robes purify and defilement flee! Give not, thinking to gain greater and be patient unto thy Lord.*[614] and, *And say: "Praise belongs to God, who has not taken to Him a son, and who has not any associate in the Kingdom, nor any protector out of humbleness." And magnify Him with repeated magnificats.*[615]

Those who associate others with God, there is as much arrogance in their hearts as is the spirit of polytheism, and polytheism must be burn in fire because *God forgives not that aught should be with Him associated; less than that He forgives to whomsoever He will.*[616] and, *And when Lokman said to his son, admonishing him, "O my son, do not associate others with God; to associate others with God is a mighty wrong."*[617]

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613 Qur'an, 59: 23
614 Qur'an, 74: 1–3
615 Qur'an, 17: 111
616 Qur'an, 4: 48 and 116
617 Qur'an, 31: 13

For the same reason, infidels, like polytheists, also belong to Hell because despite the Prophet's call to believe in one God, they refused to respond to his call and rebelled against him. Exempt are those unbelievers who were indeed in search of the truth but their search was aborted as a result of the power of those who ruled over them. These group of unbelievers are among the downtrodden (*mustaḍ'afīn*). But if they were not oppressed and did not search enough, or willingly accepted another religions, were afflicted with deviation from the straight path and perplexed, they will end up in the fire of Hell as well, as the Qur'an says: *Surely the unbelievers, who have done evil, God would not forgive them, neither guide them on any road but the road to Gehenna, therein dwelling forever and ever; and that for God is an easy matter.*[618]

The hypocrites also will reside in Hell for the same reasons because in their reality they are unbelievers but for personal interest pretend to be believing Muslims. That is the reason that in many verses of the Qur'an they are introduced as identical with non-believers who all belong to fire of Hell. *God will gather the hypocrites and the unbelievers all in Gehenna.*[619]

The preceding discussion makes it abundantly clear that God's commands cannot be taken lightly, and whoever does so, or insults His messengers and Imāms, the fire of Hell will be his abode: *Upon the day when heaven spins dizzily and the mountains are in motion, woe that day unto those that cry lies, the day when they shall be pitched into the fire of Gehenna: This is the fire that you cried lies to!*[620]

Some other deeds that according to the Qur'an result in the perpetrator's fall into Hell include trespassing and violation of people's rights and honor, or murdering a believer, or evading war and *jihād* against unbelievers: *but for the insolent awaits an ill resort, Gehenna, wherein they are roasted an evil cradling!*[621] and *But whoso makes a breach with the Messenger*

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618 Qur'an, 4: 168–69
619 Qur'an, 4: 140
620 Qur'an, 52: 11–14
621 38: 55–56

after the guidance has become clear to him and follows a way other than the believers', him We shall turn over to what he has turned to and We shall roast him in Gehenna—an evil homecoming![622]

According to a *ḥadīth* on the Night of Ascension to Heaven (*mi'rāj*) the Prophet asked the angel of Hell to show him the fire. According to Imām Bāqir the angel showed a small portion of Hell to the Prophet, who after seeing that scene never smiled until the moment God took his soul.[623]

A vivid description of Hell is also provided by Imām 'Ali. According him, "....its depth is endless, its heat unbearable, its drinks are polluted and hot, its torture constantly renewed, its clubs are made of rough iron, its torture never decreases or ends, its inhabitants never die. It is an abode where there is no kindness and mercy, and never any requests of its inhabitants are heard or responded to."[624]

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[622] Qur'an, 4: 115, See also 4: 93: *And whoso slays a believer willfully, his recompense is Gehenna, therein dwelling forever, and God will be wroth with him and will curse him, and prepare for him a mighty chastisement,* and 8: 16: *Whoso turns his back that day to them, unless withdrawing to fight again or removing to join another host, he is laden with the burden of God's anger, and his refuge is Gehenna—an evil homecoming!*

[623] Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Āmālī,* part 87, lithograph edition, pp. 357–58

[624] Ṭūsi, *Āmālī* vol. I, lithograph edition, p. 18

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Seventy-Second Discourse

Hell and Its Levels

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *Then he whose scales are heavy they are the prosperers, and he whose scales are light they have lost their souls in Gehenna dwelling forever, the Fire smiting their faces the while they glower there. "What, were My signs not recited to you, and you cried them lies?" They shall say, "Our Lord, our adversity prevailed over us; we were an erring people. Our Lord, bring us forth out of it! Then, if we revert, we shall be evildoers indeed." "Slink you into it," He shall say, "and do not speak to Me. There is a party of My servants who said, 'Our Lord, we believe; therefore forgive us, and have mercy on us, for Thou art the best of the merciful.' But you took them for a laughing stock, till they made you forget My remembrance, mocking at them. Now today I have recompensed them for their patient endurance."*[625]

According to these verses the reason that the inhabitants of Hell ended up there was because they rejected the truth of God's words and chose evil over good. In numerous verses the reason for their destiny is described as a proof of God's word on the one hand, and the necessity of obeying His command on the other: *Those against whom thy Lord's word is realized will not believe, though every sign come to them, till they see the painful chastisement,*[626] and *If We had so willed, We could have given every soul its guidance; but now My Word is realized. Assuredly I shall fill Gehenna with jinn and men all together. So now taste, for that you forgot the encounter of this your day.*[627]

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[625] Qur'an, 23: 103–11
[626] Qur'an, 10: 96
[627] Qur'an, 32: 13

This latter verse contains profound wisdom as it explains the creation, pre-destination, and free will, the relationship between created and eternal, which, in a sense, is nothing but the manifestation of the light of God's oneness (*tawḥīd*) in the contingent realm. Even though chapter 32 does not contain any other verse dealing with God's punishment of sinners yet, Imām Ṣādiq made a statement about it that "He who is longing to enter Paradise recites chapter 56 ("*al-Wāqi'ah*"), and he who likes to learn about characteristics of Hell-fire should read chapter 32 ("*Sajdah*").[628]

In short, if God willed, He could have guided every human being through engendered or religious guidance to felicity and perfection of beauty of character. However, He willed to grant human beings free will and the ability to choose. Such a trait is, in a sense, an extension of God's own free will and operates under His Will. In other words, God has willed that human beings enter Paradise or Hell by their own will [because they have the ability to choose God's path]. Those who willingly choose to follow God's command find proximity to Him and earn Paradise, and those who chose wretchedness are afflicted with Hell and all that belongs to it.

There are some other verses that explain that wretchedness, disbelief, and other sins and crimes the hypocrites, unbelievers, and those who rebel against God commit willingly, are in fact supported by God's Will, as the Qur'an says: *Those who dispute concerning the signs of God, without any authority come to them, very hateful is that in the sight of God and the believers; so God sets a seal on every heart proud, arrogant,*[629] and *God has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes is a covering, and there awaits them a mighty chastisement.*[630]

All these and other similar verses with a strong tone and emphasis indicate that the heart of the wretched and the oppressor is sealed by God. And those human beings who have and

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628 *Thawāb al-A'māl*, Lithograph ed., p. 66
629 Qur'an, 40: 35
630 Qur'an, 2: 7

use their will power and choose good over evil do so because their will is indeed an extension of God's Will. No human being has free will independent of God, and if we think otherwise, we commit infidelity: *But you will not unless God wills; surely God is ever All-knowing, All-Wise.*[631]

Since God has sealed some hearts, people do not understand and do not believe. In many verses of the Qur'an it is stated that *God has set a seal on their hearts, so they know not*[632] and, *and a seal has been set upon their hearts, so they understand not.*[633]

Some commentators on the Qur'an assumed that such verses denote pre-destination. They translated such verses in a way that supports their argument, saying that since God knew that they would become unbelievers and oppressors, He sealed their hearts. They did not realize that these verses are modified by the preceding verse in which action has already taken place. In other words, the truth is that such people had already deviated, and therefore God sealed their hearts. The following two verses make our argument even more clear. The first verse states that sickness existed in the hearts of non-believers and God only increased that sickness. And in the second verse we know that the heart of the followers of Moses had already swerved and God only caused their hearts to swerve more: *In their hearts is a sickness, and God has increased their sickness*[634] and, *And when Moses said to his people, "O my people, why do you hurt me, though you know I am the Messenger of God to you?" When they swerved, God caused their hearts to swerve; and God guides never the people of the ungodly.*[635]

This is an important theological issue. The question to raise is, where did that sickness in the hearts of non-believers come from, and how were the hearts of the followers of Moses

[631] Qur'an, 76: 30 and 81: 29
[632] Qur'an, 9: 93
[633] Qur'an, 9: 87
[634] Qur'an, 2: 10
[635] Qur'an, 61: 5

swerved? If sickness entered the hearts of non-believers independently of their role in it, then that is pre-destination, and if such sickness is caused all by themselves, then what was God's role? The first argument pushes one toward determinism and the second toward fatalism. One must be careful in relation to both of those positions and not fall into either of these traps [fatalism or determinism]. Rather, follow the principle [developed by the Ahl al-Bayt] that invites man to follow *An affair between two affairs* that guides us to the truth and the straight path, and a true believer must use his utmost effort to discover the truth and base his faith on a solid foundation.

To the extent that we may consider man independent of God in his words and deeds, we remove Him from our life and affairs. This is nothing but polytheism, for polytheism does not mean to negate God's sacred being; rather it means to assign an associate and a partner to Him in the affairs of the world. It does not make any difference whether an affair is significant or insignificant, or the partner is a man or an angel. Conversely, realizing that man's will is nothing but the extension of God's Will alone is the true meaning of believing in His Unity (*tawḥīd*). This statement should not lead us to the conclusion of determinism. There are several *aḥādīth* narrated through the authority of Imām Ṣādiq that make this argument clear. According to him, the Prophet said, "He who assumes that God commands man to do evil or commit sins, he attributes dishonesty and lies to Him; he who thinks that good or evil take place outside of God's Will and ordinance, negates His kingly power; he who assumes that sins are committed without God's power, accuses Him of lying; and he who assumes so, his abode will be fire."[636]

[636] Kulayni, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, vol. I. p. 158

Yūnis ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān narrates that Imām Riḍā said,

> “O Yūnis! Do not speak like [the Qadarīyah[637]] for their words are not the words of the people of Paradise, or Hell, or Satan. Because the people of Paradise recite *Praise belongs to God, who guided us unto this; had God not guided us, we had surely never been guided;*[638] and the inhabitants of Hell shall say *Our Lord, our adversity prevailed over us; we were an erring people. Our Lord, bring us forth out of it;*[639] and does not Satan say, *My Lord, for Thy perverting me I shall deck all fair to them in the earth, and I shall pervert them, all together?*”[640]
>
> And I [Yūnis] responded, “By God I do not speak like the Qadarīyah. I say that nothing shall exist except that which God wills, decrees, and ordains.
>
> The Imām said, “That is not correct. Nothing can exist unless God decrees, ordains, and wills.”[641]

On another occasion a man asked Imām Ṣādiq if God compels man to commit sins, and he said no. Then the man asked whether God entrusts man’s affair to him to be free. Again the Imām said no. The man, who was confused, then asked what the correct answer was. The Imām said, “Between compelling man to commit sins and entrusting his affairs fully to him, there is a third and very subtle alternative, and it is indeed God’s

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[637] Classical Islamic theological school during the seventh through ninth centuries, which asserted human free will in decision-making and as justification for God’s power to blame or punish humans. Humans’ capacity to make choices makes them responsible for the outcome of their actions and absolves God of responsibility for evil in the world. Many of this school’s doctrines were adopted by the Mu‘tazilites. *EI*[1], 251.

[638] Qur’an 7: 43

[639] Qur’an, 23: 106

[640] Qur’an, 15: 38

[641] Kulayni, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī,* vol. I. p. 157–58

special favor to human beings; and that is neither predestination nor free will, but an affair between the two (*lā jabra wa lā tafwīḍ bal amra bayn al-amrayn*)."[642]

Also, Ḥassan ibn 'Ali Washā' narrates that one day he asked Imām 'Ali ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā if God entrusts man's affairs to him completely. He said, "God is more victorious and powerful than doing so." Then I asked if God compels man to commit sins; he said "God is more just than that." Then the Imām added, "God said, *O children of Adam! I am more responsible in all good deeds that you do and you are more responsible in all evil things you do. You commit sins because of the power I placed in you.*[643]

Many other narrators have recorded statements made by Imām Bāqir and Imām Ṣādiq on the same issues. "Indeed God is more merciful to His servants than compelling them to commit sins and then punish them. God is more powerful than willing something that doesn't take place." The questioner then asked, "Is there is third path for man between pre-destination and free will?" And the Imām replied, "Yes indeed. There is a path vaster than the space between Heaven and earth."[644]

These narrations were presented as examples in order to demonstrate the importance of a third path between pre-destination and free will (an affair between the two affairs) in Shī'a theology. Indeed, by articulating such a principle the Imāms rendered a major service to the Islamic community of their time because in light of their explanation many unresolved issues and unanswered theological questions were resolved. Only the Imāms who had direct access to Divine knowledge and experienced these realities could have presented such original and creative responses to complicated theological questions. The principle they introduced does not apply to the human domain alone; rather, it is also applicable in the world of engendered existence where everything is subject to a third principle between pre-destination and free will.

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[642] Ibid., pp. 157–60
[643] Ibid, p. 157.
[644] Ibid., pp. 157–60

According to those thinkers who believe in pre-destination, God's Will dominates over all human behavior, denoting that the human being has no choice in his action. In contrast, those who advocate for the doctrine of free will reject any role for God in human behavior and argue that all man's actions are his own creation. According to narrations mentioned in the preceding pages, the Imāms rejected both of these extreme positions. According to them the doctrine of pre-destination and determinism is not valid because it questions God's justice. God in His wisdom and mercy never forces a man to commit sin and then holds him responsible and punishes him. As a conscious being, man knows instinctively that he has choices in his actions. To negate this principle is to negate man's consciousness.

As for the doctrine of free will, it negates God's sovereignty and dominance over all things. God's power and dominance never diminishes or ceases to exist, and nothing is outside of the domain of His power. Without any exception, all existent things, whether in their creation or in their subsistence, are under God's domination. If we say that man is completely free in that category of his deeds and God has given man full choice in certain action, it means that we have removed God's role in this category of man's deeds. This is injustice to God. Therefore, we can say that the doctrine of pre-destination is man's injustice to God, and the doctrine of free will is God's injustice to man. Both of these are impossibilities and therefore dismissed. Hence the doctrine of "an affair between the two affairs," which is above the doctrine of free will and below the doctrine of pre-destination. This is the true meaning of Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*). In the realm of *tawḥīd* there is no separation, and everything is ultimately a manifestation of God's Names and Attributes. In this realm man possesses free will, but this quality is under God's Will; it is God's Will itself: *But you will not unless God wills; surely God is ever All knowing, All Wise.*[645]

[645] Qur'an, 76: 30 and 81: 29

The following anecdote may shed some light on this discussion. Let us assume that a wealthy man has a male and a female slave. He allows them to marry and gives them the basic necessities of a house and a piece of land to work on and make a living. According to a deterministic view, granting all this does not change the master-slave relationship, and ultimately the two slaves and everything he gave them belong to the master. According to the doctrine of free will, the slave will become the sole owner of all those properties and can do whatever he wishes with them. The ownership of the master will be null and void. The truth is that the slave will become the owner of what the master gave him, but independent of the master. In other words, the master is the ultimate owner and the slave a secondary owner by virtue of his affiliation with the master. This is the meaning and application of "an affair between two affairs." Like the art of calligraphy that can be attributed to the artist or to his hand, both are correct and neither attribution nullifies the other.[646] We must, however, always bear in mind that the ownership of the master and slave and properties are all contingencies, whereas the mastery and dominance of God over human beings is absolute and true ownership. That is the reason we say the universe with all its beauty belongs to God, and the perfect world of creation is the scene of manifestation of His Goodness and Beauty: *Glory be to God above that they describe, except for God's sincere servants.*[647]

So God's mastery and ownership extend over all things, from all contingent things to detached intellects and the universal soul as well as the world of nature.

All evil deeds and ugliness emanate from human beings and not from God. God is pure good, and He is the creator of all good. Nothing evil or ugly comes from God. Evil and sin are the products of human error. They are not part of the human state but are accidents to the human soul. The essence of the human being is good and made of good because God is pure good. All evil and sins are the result of deviation from the

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[646] Kulayni, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī,* vol. I. p. 156
[647] Qur'an, 37: 159–60

straight path, and they belong to Hell and must be burned there. Paradise is the abode of the pure and the righteous. All human beings go through trials and tribulations in this world, but those who profess *tawḥīd* and are steadfast and patient, and those who tear down the veil of illusions will witness God's presence and are no longer sinners. Committing sin becomes irrelevant to such servants of God. Even those who may not do so in this world would realize *tawḥīd* at the moment of death, or in the graves, or on the Bridge, even though they may end up in Hell where are these impurities will be burned away.

A believer and a disbeliever are both theophanies of God; the first is the manifestation of God's mercy, while the second is the manifestation of God's wrath. Paradise and Hell are both loci of these manifestations, the first of God's mercy and the second of His wrath. If one looks at them with a truthful eye, all are true and legitimate in their own right.

Hell is the appearance of the veil, the veil of ignorance and immersion in multiplicities and negligence of the One God: *No indeed; but that they were earning has rusted upon their hearts. No indeed; but upon that day they shall be veiled from their Lord.*[648]

All sins originate from this negligence and only those who genuinely and sincerely professed *tawḥīd* in this world will be immune from such a veil: *Surely you, and that which you worship apart from God, are fuel of Hell; you shall go down to it. If those had been gods, they would never have gone down to it; yet every one of them shall therein abide forever; there shall be sighing for them therein, and naught they shall hear. But as for those unto whom already the reward most fair has gone forth from Us, they shall be kept far from it, neither shall they hear any whisper of it, and they shall dwell forever in that their souls desired.*[649]

These verses clearly indicate that Hell is the manifestation of polytheism and doubt in one God; and whoever doubts will enter Hell. As long as one's eyes are closed to this truth, one

648 Qur'an, 83: 14–15
649 Qur'an, 21: 98–102

will not realize this, but once certainty is attained and veils are removed and the hidden realities are revealed, *therefore We have now removed from thee thy covering, and so thy sight today is piercing.*[650]

Since human beings journey from this world that is the realm of multiplicity, all shall enter Hell first. Those who traveled from the state of multiplicity to experience and believe *tawḥīd* shall leave Hell [and journey to Heaven]: *Not one of you there is, but he shall go down to it; that for thy Lord is a thing decreed, determined. Then We shall deliver those that were godfearing; and the evildoers We shall leave there, hobbling on their knees.*[651]

We must know that man in his primordial state believed in God's Unity; therefore Paradise was created before Hell, as God also created obedience before rebellion, good before evil, mercy before wrath, life before death, sun before moon, and light before darkness.[652] Perhaps the multiplicity of the seven gates of Hell, each of which leads the sinners to a different level, is in consideration of the degree of sins and the veils that one is preoccupied with. Indeed, the more one is engaged with contingent affairs of the world and the illusions created by multiplicities, the harsher the level of Hell.

The lowest level of Hell is Gehenna. Higher levels are Laẓay, Ḥutamah, Saqar, Jaḥīm, Sa'īr, and finally Hāwiyah. As we mentioned before, Hell is the realm of pride, arrogance, and those who suffer from the disease of grandiosity, that is to say, those who claim more than what they really are. Unfortunately, this disease often afflicts scholars (*'ulamā*). There is an eye-opening, and in fact shocking, statement in this regard attributed to Imām Ṣādiq regarding scholars' connection to Hell. Accord-

[650] Qur'an, 50: 22

[651] Qur'an, 19: 71–72

[652] Imām Bāqir said, "Indeed God, Majestic and Glorious is He, created Heaven before Hell, obedience before sins. He created mercy before wrath, and good before evil." See, Kulayni, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī: Radah*, p. 145.

ing to him, "There are scholars who love to amass their knowledge and do not share it with anyone. Their abode is the first level of Hell."

There are scholars who when they receive advice, they resent it, but when they give advice, they are harsh. Their place is the second level of Hell.

There are scholars who put their knowledge at the service of the wealthy and the powerful and have no respect for the poor and the weak. Their abode is the third level of Hell.

There are scholars who behave like tyrants and oppressive kings. When someone does not accept their views or rejects their ideas they become angry. Their place is the fourth level of Hell.

There are scholars who recite narrations from Christian and Jewish traditions to impress people with their knowledge. Their place is the fifth level of Hell.

There are scholars who like to issue verdicts (*fatwā*) and tell people, "Ask me!" Often they do not issue a solid and correct verdict. God does not like pretentious scholars. Their place is in the sixth level of Hell.

There are scholars who acquire knowledge so that people recognize them as a source of wisdom and knowledge. Their place is in the seventh level of Hell.[653]

The Qur'an warns scholars of all these traits and afflictions in strong language: *Reckon not that those who rejoice in what they have brought, and love to be praised for what they have not done—do not reckon them secure from chastisement; for them awaits a painful chastisement.*[654]

It is for this reason that one may think that even when the Twelfth Imām reappears, such scholars will refute him with their own reasoning and condemn him, as many did with the prophet: *when their Messengers brought them the clear signs,*

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[653] *Kitāb al-Khiṣāl*, lithograph edition, vol. II, pp. 7–8, or Hurufi ed. pp. 352–53.

[654] Qur'an, 3: 188

will not realize this, but once certainty is attained and veils are removed and the hidden realities are revealed, *therefore We have now removed from thee thy covering, and so thy sight today is piercing.*[650]

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650 Qur'an, 50: 22

651 Qur'an, 19: 71–72

652 Imām Bāqir said, "Indeed God, Majestic and Glorious is He, created Heaven before Hell, obedience before sins. He created mercy before wrath, and good before evil." See, Kulayni, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī: Radah*, p. 145.

ing to him, "There are scholars who love to amass their knowledge and do not share it with anyone. Their abode is the first level of Hell."

There are scholars who when they receive advice, they resent it, but when they give advice, they are harsh. Their place is the second level of Hell.

There are scholars who put their knowledge at the service of the wealthy and the powerful and have no respect for the poor and the weak. Their abode is the third level of Hell.

There are scholars who behave like tyrants and oppressive kings. When someone does not accept their views or rejects their ideas they become angry. Their place is the fourth level of Hell.

There are scholars who recite narrations from Christian and Jewish traditions to impress people with their knowledge. Their place is the fifth level of Hell.

There are scholars who like to issue verdicts (*fatwā*) and tell people, "Ask me!" Often they do not issue a solid and correct verdict. God does not like pretentious scholars. Their place is in the sixth level of Hell.

There are scholars who acquire knowledge so that people recognize them as a source of wisdom and knowledge. Their place is in the seventh level of Hell.[653]

The Qur'an warns scholars of all these traits and afflictions in strong language: *Reckon not that those who rejoice in what they have brought, and love to be praised for what they have not done—do not reckon them secure from chastisement; for them awaits a painful chastisement.*[654]

It is for this reason that one may think that even when the Twelfth Imām reappears, such scholars will refute him with their own reasoning and condemn him, as many did with the prophet: *when their Messengers brought them the clear signs,*

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[653] *Kitāb al-Khiṣāl*, lithograph edition, vol. II, pp. 7–8, or Hurufi ed. pp. 352–53.

[654] Qur'an, 3: 188

they rejoiced in what knowledge they had, and were encompassed by that they mocked at.[655] God knows best.

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[655] Qur'an, 40: 83

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Seventy-Third Discourse

Hell and Its Peculiar Nature and Characteristics

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *And they say, "The Fire shall not touch us save a number of days." Say: "Have you taken with God a covenant? God will not fail in His covenant; or say you things against God of which you know nothing? Not so; whoso earns evil, and is encompassed by his transgression—those are the inhabitants of the Fire; there they shall dwell forever."*[656]

On the Day of Judgment entering Hell or being saved from God's wrath is not illusion or contingent, but real, as these verses clearly explain. Hell is the abode of the evil like a trash can that contains all trash in itself. According to these verses, the Jews claimed that this world and the Hereafter belong to them by virtue of being children of Israel. If they were to go to Hell, their stay there would be only forty days, that is, the period of time that Moses went to Mount Sinai when his people rebelled against Aaron and began to worship a golden calf; and after that they would be sent back to Paradise, enjoying all its bounties. The Qur'an makes it clear that these claims are false, because pride and arrogance from any man or any people belong to the realm of fire. Therefore, on the Day of Judgment a sinful man cannot buy his way to Paradise: *Surely those who disbelieve, and die disbelieving, there shall not be accepted from any one of them the whole earth full of gold, if he would ransom himself thereby; for them awaits a painful chastisement, and they shall have no helpers.*[657]

In fact the origin of and reason for the creation of Hell was man's rebellion against God, his refusal to remember Him, immersion in material and worldly life, and carelessness about life after death. Meeting God, the Most High, is the only means

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[656] Qur'an, 2: 80–81

[657] Qur'an, 3: 91. See also 5: 36–37 and 32: 20–21.

of attracting man's heart to the origin of knowledge. This is the reason that when the Qur'an speaks about those who are always after worldly pleasures, it states with such certainty that their final destiny in Hell: *Surely those who look not to encounter Us and are well-pleased with the present life and are at rest in it, and those who are heedless of Our signs, those—their refuge is the Fire, for that they have been earning.*[658]

Hell is a mirror of the reality of the soul in a state of being distanced and veiled [from God]. As long as the carnal and rebellious soul is active and is not transformed to the blaming soul (*nafs lawwāmah*) and ultimately the soul reached certainty (*nafs al-muṭma'innah*) Hell will be there. The carnal soul constantly tempts man to commit evil. Occasionally it calms down but soon starts its evil acts again and preoccupies man till the moment of death. *Whomsoever God guides, he is rightly guided; and whom He leads astray—thou wilt not find for them protectors, apart from Him. And We shall muster them on the Resurrection Day upon their faces, blind, dumb, deaf; their refuge shall be Gehenna, and whensoever it abates We shall increase for them the Blaze.*[659]

In other word, man's carnal soul remains in a constant state of change and experiences one kind of torment after another, and Hell encompasses the sinner and disbeliever. As we mentioned before, all these worlds exist as we speak, vertically. This very same world we live in is filled with imperfections, corruptions, preoccupation with multiplicities, and forgetfulness of God, which all in all constitute Hell in this world, except that the flames of its fire, and the inhaling and exhaling of its air, are not visible, until man dies or all veils are removed from before his eyes. The proof for this argument is the Qur'anic verses according to which Noah's people went to Hell after they were drowned: *And because of their transgressions*

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[658] Qur'an, 10: 7–8

[659] Qur'an, 17: 97. See also 20: 74: *Whosoever comes unto his Lord a sinner, for him awaits Gehenna wherein he shall neither die nor live.*

they were drowned, and admitted into a Fire, for they found not, apart from God, any to help them.[660]

There are vivid descriptions about the types of punishment in Hell in the Qur'an that are difficult to understand, much less believe: *We shall certainly roast them at a Fire; as often as their skins are wholly burned, We shall give them in exchange other skins, that they may taste the chastisement.*[661] All these tortures are for those who violated the rights and dignity of the people in this world and those who were proud or killed the innocent. Even if God gives them chances to do good, they will continue to behave the same way, as it has always been the case with tyrants, oppressing kings, and abominable and treacherous scholars. Therefore, if we read in the Qur'an or narrations terrifying descriptions of torments and types of punishment, we should not be surprised because such outcomes are the result of man's actions and deeds in this world, as *God is not unjust to His servants.*[662]

As to the existence of Hell on this earth, there are several narrations recorded by Ibn 'Abbās. According to one narration, two Jewish men went to Imām 'Ali and asked him where Paradise and Hell are located. The Imām replied that Paradise is up in the skies but Hell is right here on earth.[663]

It is mentioned that within the fire of Hell, there is a section that its inhabitants try to avoid. That is the section that is set aside for proud and arrogant people, Satan, those who do not believe in the Day of Judgment, and those who are hostile to the Prophet and his progeny. It must be mentioned that the harshest kinds of suffering will be for those who commit op-

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660 Qur'an, 71: 25

661 Qur'an, 4: 56. See also 32: 27: *Have they not seen how We drive the water to the dry land and bring forth crops therewith whereof their cattle and themselves eat? What, will they not see?*; and 32: 20: *But as for the ungodly, their refuge shall be the Fire; as often as they desire to come forth from it, they shall be restored into it, and it shall be said to them, "Taste the chastisement of the Fire, which you cried lies to."*

662 Qur'an, 3: 182

663 *Kitāb al-Khiṣāl*, lithograph edition, vol. II, p. 147

pression and injustice, those who shed blood and kill the innocent. Their food is from the fruits of the tree of Zakkoum: *...the Tree of Ez-Zakkoum? We have appointed it as a trial for the evildoers. It is a tree that comes forth in the root of Hell; its spathes are as the heads of Satans, and they eat of it, and of it fill their bellies, then on top of it they have a brew of boiling water, then their return is unto Hell. They found their fathers erring, and they run in their footsteps.*[664]

The Zakkoum is the symbol of wretchedness, and in accordance with the amount of sins and evil deeds that one commits, branches of this tree find roots in his soul. Those evil deeds and sins have been described in a *ḥadīth* to include abandoning obligatory pillars of religion, being careless to the poor and the needy, being unforgiving, backbiting, violating the dignity of a believer, being careless to one's neighbor and orphans, and finally being mean and disgraceful to one's parents. The exact opposite of the Zakkoum is the *ṭūbā* tree that is indeed the symbol of purity, grace, goodness and sanctity, and *wilāyah.*

From our discussion in the preceding pages it becomes clear that Hell is where all evil deeds and sins issue from. In consideration with the type and nature of the sins and evil deeds that a person may commit, he will enter one of the levels of Hell if he does not repent and make up for his sins, and if he does not appeal for and is not saved by intercession. The gates and levels of Hell each represent one category of those sins and evil deeds. On the entrance of each gate is inscribed certain virtues that would save man from entering into Hell. Those virtues include, first and foremost, being godfearing, helping the poor, avoiding lying, respecting religion, resisting the temptations of the carnal soul, struggling on the path of God, being

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[664] Qur'an, 37: 62–68. See also 44: 43–49: *Lo, the Tree of Ez-Zakkoum is the food of the guilty, like molten copper, bubbling in the belly as boiling water bubbles. Take him, and thrust him into the midst of Hell, then pour over his head the chastisement of boiling water! Taste! Surely thou art the mighty, the noble.*

charitable and paying alms, being humble, and finally, scrutinizing one's own actions before standing before others to scrutinize their deeds.[665]

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[665] Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, Hurūfī edition, vol. VIII, pp. 145–46

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Seventy-Fourth Discourse

The Reality of Hell: Veiled from God's Mercy

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book: *No indeed; but that they were earning has rusted upon their hearts. No indeed; but upon that day they shall be veiled from their Lord, then they shall roast in Hell. Then it shall be said to them, "This is that you cried lies to."*[666]

We established in previous chapters that Hell is indeed a veil, and a veil is that which makes man forgetful of God. Its effects in the engendered world manifest themselves in different forms and cause man to go through all kinds of tribulations and torments. As a result such servants become fully deprived of all blessings and bounties in the Hereafter.

Imām 'Ali in a sermon in *Nahj al-Balāghah* states:

> Hasten toward the Return, and be prepared for the moment of death. Indeed people feel they will be cut off from their wishes and death will take them away, and the gate of repentance will be closed before them. You become like those who were before you in search of your wishes. Know that you are travelers in this world that does not belong to you. They informed you of your departure and commanded you to take provisions for this journey.
>
> Know that the thin skin of your body cannot stand fire, so have mercy on yourself. Indeed you have tested yourself in the face of hardships of the world. You complain and scream when a thorn hits your body and you bleed, or when the hot pebbles of the desert burn your feet. Then how will you feel when you are placed between two layers of fire in the company of burning sands and the Satan?[667]

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666 Qur'an, 83: 14–17

667 *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon # 181, Abduh edition, Cairo, pp. 347–48

From the verses of the Qur'an and similar sermons mentioned above we can conclude that the root of disbelief and polytheism must be sought in man's disillusionment with God's mercy to the extent that he could not see his connection to God and could not consider himself worthy of His mercy, and hence becomes totally hopeless of witnessing God, as the Qur'an clearly indicates: *And those who disbelieve in God's signs and the encounter with Him—they despair of My mercy, and there awaits them a painful chastisement.*[668]

On the other hand, we know that the Hereafter is the realm of theophany of God's mercy and the wellspring of all beauty and perfection. Even though Divine mercy encompasses all creation universally, His particular benevolence is extended only to the best among the believers: *My mercy embraces all things, and I shall prescribe it for those who are godfearing and pay the alms.*[669] In other words, *all things* in creation will enjoy His mercy, even the unbelievers, that is to say, even the disbelievers will be enjoying His grace and mercy in one way of the other. It is the disillusionment that veils them and prevents them from realizing His mercy and not acknowledging His Oneness, as the Qur'an says: *And between them is a veil.*[670] According to these verses, then, while even the hypocrites are among those who may enjoy God's mercy, yet they are deprived of it because they are unable to tear apart the veil. The outward manifestation of this deprivation is the very torments they are subject to, which is the reality of their deeds—that is, forgetfulness of God:

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[668] Qur'an, 29: 23

[669] Qur'an, 7: 156

[670] Qur'an, 57: 13–14: *It shall be said, "Return you back behind, and seek for a light!" And a wall shall be set up between them, having a door in the inward whereof is mercy, and against the outward thereof is chastisement." They shall be calling unto them, "Were we not with you?" They shall say, "Yes indeed; but you tempted yourselves, and you awaited, and you were in doubt, and fancies deluded you, until God's commandment came, and the Deluder deluded you concerning God."*

We have created for Gehenna many jinn and men:
they have hearts, but understand not with them;
they have eyes, but perceive not with them;
they have ears, but they hear not with them.
They are like cattle; nay, rather they are further astray.
Those—they are the heedless.[671]

Indeed all they do behind this veil is as a mirage in a spacious plain that the man of thirst supposes to be water. They will never be able to go beyond illusions and falsehood, and will never see and recognize the truth. Since their lives are immersed in deception and pride, they are connected to Hell: *Surely you [idolators] and that you worship apart from God, are fuel for hell; you shall go down to it.*[672]

Other than those who were described thus far, there have been some human beings in history who claimed divinity and commanded the people to worship them. Emperors of China, Roman emperors, and pharaohs of Egypt are but a few examples. They will go to Hell and burn: *If those had been gods, they would never have gone down to it; yet every one of them shall therein abide forever; there shall be sighing for them therein, and naught they shall hear.*[673]

There were some other individuals in human history who were worshiped by people. They never had such claims but always called people to worship one God. Indeed ʻAbdullah ibn Zibaʻrī, a poet from the Quraysh tribe, questioned the Prophet about Prophet Ezra, Mary, and Christ. In response to him this verses was revealed: *But as for those unto whom already the reward most fair has gone forth from Us, they shall be kept far from it neither shall they hear any whisper of it, and they shall dwell forever in that their souls desired; the greatest terror shall not grieve them, and the angels shall receive them: "This is your day that you were promised."*[674]

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[671] Qur'an, 7: 179
[672] Qur'an, 21: 98
[673] Qur'an, 21: 99–100
[674] Qur'an, 21: 101–2

Our discussion makes it abundantly clear that the reality of Hell is being distanced from God, created as a result of pride and arrogance, and the veil of "I-ness" (*anāīyah*). Some of the most direct discussions of criteria that separate the inhabitants of Paradise and Hell are presented in the following chapter. *Then, when the Great Catastrophe comes upon the day when man shall remember what he has striven, and Hell is advanced for whoever sees, then as for him who was insolent and preferred the present life, surely Hell shall be the refuge. But as for him who feared the station of his Lord and forbade the soul its caprice, surely Paradise shall be the refuge.*[675]

The path to Paradise is straight so that all human potentials to know God are actualized. In contrast, the road to Hell is deviation from the straight path. It is tortuous in many different ways. Man must use his own God-given faculty of intellect to choose the right path, or follow whom he trusts, a Friend of God who has attained the station of *wilāyah* and who has entered into God's sanctuary. There is not a third way. *They also say, "If we had only heard, or had understood, we would not have been of the inhabitants of the Blaze." So they confess their sins.*[676]

The veils that distance us from God come in a variety of forms and shapes. Some are very powerful and some are weak, and many are in between. Each of these types also has its own specific way of manifesting itself. A narration known as *Mi'rājīyah* attributed to the Prophet and his experience on his nocturnal journey explains different kinds of sins and corresponding punishments for them on the Day of Judgment.[677] A *ḥadīth* narrated on the authority of Imām 'Ali describes the types of punishments that are set aside specifically for corrupt scholars of religion, sinful and corrupt chanters of the Qur'an, tyrants and oppressive kings and rulers, ministers and governors who betray people, and guardians and officials who lie to

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675 Qur'an, 79: 34–41

676 Qur'an, 67: 10–11

677 For a graphic description of these punishments see *'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, lithograph edition, p. 241.

people.[678] Another *ḥadīth* describes the state of those who committed injustice against the Household of the Prophet and their place in the lowest level of Hell along with hypocrites.[679]

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[678] Shaykh Ṣadūq, *Kitāb al-Khiṣāl*, lithograph edition, vol. I, part V, p. 142
[679] *'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, lithograph edition, p. 241

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Seventy-Fifth Discourse

Eternal Life in Paradise and Hell

God, the All-Wise, has stated in his Noble Book, *...the day it comes, no soul shall speak save by His leave; some of them shall be wretched and some happy. As for the wretched, they shall be in the Fire, wherein there shall be for them moaning and sighing, therein dwelling forever, so long as the heavens and earth abide, save as thy Lord will; surely thy Lord accomplishes what He desires. And as for the happy, they shall be in Paradise, therein dwelling forever, so long as the heavens and earth abide, save as thy Lord will—for a gift unbroken.*[680]

The above verses explain the place and status of the inhabitants of Paradise and that of the wretched in Hell. They clearly indicate that both groups will remain in their respective abode as long as Heaven and earth stand. The length of the time of this stay is willed by God, and He can take both groups out whenever He wills, since for logical and religious reasons the inhabitants of Paradise will never leave their abode. If the verse says that *save as thy Lord will*, it is to emphasize God's power and His dominance over all things. His power never becomes subject to any other factor or cause. If the inhabitants of Paradise will stay there, it is because God wills so; similarly, the inhabitants of Hell will remain there unless God wills otherwise. This kind of exception, which in the terminology of *'irfān* is called providential exceptionalism (*istithnā'-i mashīyat*), is mentioned in the Qur'an frequently.[681] There are numerous traditions and narrations that deal with this issue, and we will examine them in the course of our discussion. Before that, however, we have to make a few introductory remarks.

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680 Qur'an, 11: 105–8

681 See for example, 87: 6–7: *We shall make thee recite, to forget not save what God wills*; and 5: 48: *If God had willed, He would have made you one nation; but that He may try you in what has come to you.*

First, our world is the realm of action and motion, and many potentialities that guide the rational soul toward perfection. The rational soul is never inactive or fixed. In accordance with the laws of trans-substantial motion (*ḥarakat al-jawharīyah*) as the human body is always in state of change and transformation, our soul is also in a constant state of motion and continuously transforms from one state to another, bringing all potentialities to actualities. This is in contrast to the world of the Hereafter that is the realm of detachment and pure actualization and permanence. When the reality of the soul begins to manifest itself, it finds itself fixed and permanent because spirit is a detached being. Everything that the rational soul attains in this world it will find in the Hereafter and will possess it. The only difference is in the way those things are attained; in our world they are achieved gradually, whereas in the Hereafter the soul attains them at once and possesses them permanently. To put it in a simple language, this world of hours is where we plant; the Hereafter is where we harvest: "Today is the time for action but not reckoning, and tomorrow is the time for reckoning and no action."[682] And *whosoever is blind in this world shall be blind in the world to come, and he shall be even further astray from the way.*[683]

Secondly, our world is the outward manifestation of the Hereafter, and the Hereafter is in fact the inner reality of this world. These two realms indeed represent one single reality in two forms. The difference between them is in our perception. Our world is the realm of pride, negligence of God, and many veils, and the Hereafter is the world of the truth where all veils are removed and the light of Divine Unity illuminates the world of contingencies: *We have now removed from thee thy covering, and so thy sight today is piercing.*[684] It is the realm wherein *whoso has done an atom's weight of good shall see it, and whoso has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it.*[685]

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682 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib
683 Qur'an, 17: 71
684 Qur'an, 50: 22
685 Qur'an, 50: 22

Thirdly, all human beings, indeed all things, move toward God. All souls will taste death and eventually will be annihilated in the realm of His Essence, where no matter, detached beings, joy or sadness, or any name or signs exist. This is the world of total annihilation, and anything that may claim entification has no place there; it is where kingdom belongs to Him alone.[686]

Fourthly, after all things are totally annihilated in His Sacred Essence then the realm of subsistence after annihilation begins. This is the world that is defined as the world of subsistence in God (*baqā' bil'Lah*). Here the rational soul descends from the world of the corporeal (*nasūt*) to world of Invincibility (*jabarūt*). All qualities that man attributes to God before he finds them in his own soul, he experiences and witnesses. A sincere believer witnesses all his faith and good deeds, as the disbeliever observes all his infidelity, and the oppressor sees all oppression he committed against others. Here each man will reside eternally in the company of his deeds because they are indeed manifestations of his soul and they will be with him eternally, *therein dwelling forever, so long as the heavens and earth abide*. This is called subsisting in the realm of eternity (*khulūd*). Annihilation no longer exists there, as this is the world of subsistence. The rational soul is no longer veiled there but is eternally alive with all its unique characteristics. Even if a soul attains a higher station as a result of repentance or intercession, these two events will also be witnessed in their heavenly states. In short, *khulūd* is a reality that cannot be doubted or rejected in any form.

In light of these introductory remarks, it becomes clear that *khulūd* is an objective reality as numerous verses of the Qur'an and traditions indicate. A simple example would shed more light on this argument. Imagine a carpenter, a calligrapher, or a painter who fell unconscious. In such a state none of them

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686 Qur'an, 40: 16. See also 40: 16: "*Whose is the Kingdom today?*" "*God's, the One, the Omnipotent*"; 21: 93: *all shall return to Us*; and 29: 21: *chastising whom He will, and having mercy on whomsoever He will, and unto Him you shall be turned.*

First, our world is the realm of action and motion, and many potentialities that guide the rational soul toward perfection. The rational soul is never inactive or fixed. In accordance with the laws of trans-substantial motion (*ḥarakat al-jawharīyah*) as the human body is always in state of change and transformation, our soul is also in a constant state of motion and continuously transforms from one state to another, bringing all potentialities to actualities. This is in contrast to the world of the Hereafter that is the realm of detachment and pure actualization and permanence. When the reality of the soul begins to manifest itself, it finds itself fixed and permanent because spirit is a detached being. Everything that the rational soul attains in this world it will find in the Hereafter and will possess it. The only difference is in the way those things are attained; in our world they are achieved gradually, whereas in the Hereafter the soul attains them at once and possesses them permanently. To put it in a simple language, this world of hours is where we plant; the Hereafter is where we harvest: "Today is the time for action but not reckoning, and tomorrow is the time for reckoning and no action."[682] And *whosoever is blind in this world shall be blind in the world to come, and he shall be even further astray from the way.*[683]

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686 Qur'an, 40: 16. See also 40: 16: *"Whose is the Kingdom today?" "God's, the One, the Omnipotent"*; 21: 93: *all shall return to Us*; and 29: 21: *chastising whom He will, and having mercy on whomsoever He will, and unto Him you shall be turned.*

possess those skills that they have in a normal state; a painter cannot paint and a calligrapher cannot write. When they resume consciousness, however, all those skills return to them again. This is a metaphor to clarify what subsistence after annihilation (*baqā' ba'd al-fanā'*) means. It explains that in the station of annihilation nothing exists except God, but in the realm of subsistence all previously existent things will return to their proper place and will be eternal in that station. As we discussed in the 39th discourse, no existent thing will become non-existent. Change and transformation does not mean destruction or annihilation. Therefore, our actions and deeds remain in the engendered world forever and in the world of *khulūd* are witnessed in their heavenly state.

There have been some scholars in the past who questioned the validity of this argument. For example, Ibrāhīm ibn Sayyār Naẓẓām, a prominent Mu'tazili theologian (d. 231/846) argued that the concept of *khulūd* contradicts the idea of subsistence in God because subsistence ultimately belongs to God alone. Hishām ibn Ḥakam (d. 206/822) [a student of Imām Ṣādiq] put an end to this criticism by providing a convincing answer. He responded that the inhabitants of Paradise subsist by Him who causes them to subsist, and God subsists unto Himself.[687] In other words, the existence and subsistence of all beings is contingent, whereas God's subsistence is essential and necessary, independent of all, and sufficient unto Himself.

One may argue that human life is limited to certain number of years and even if all those years are filled with sins, it is an injustice to pay for such a short period of time with eternal punishment. The answer is that in the Hereafter God awakens man to the reality of his deeds and punishes and/or rewards him in accordance with the number of years he lived in the world. Here eternity does not mean permanence. This is vertical time, not horizontal, and man receives punishment or reward in proportion with his life in this world. In our world time seems non-existent once it is passed. In the Hereafter it is in permanent

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687 Kashāshī, *Kitāb al-Rijāl*, Bombay edition, p. 177
اهلُ الجَنَة يَبقَوْنَ بِمُبقٍ لَهُم وَ اللهُ يبقَى بِلا مُبق

existence and beyond time in ordinary sense. Therefore, God never commits an iota of injustice in rewarding or punishing His servants. What He does is indeed absolute justice that finds outward manifestation without being subject to contingencies.[688]

It must be mentioned that most discussions about *khulūd* pertain to Hell and not Paradise and must be presented separately. The world of the Hereafter is the realm of the truth where servants of God will be judged in accordance with their intention and faith. If evil penetrates someone's intention and he develops a love for this world, spends his life in disbelief, and commits oppression and injustice, he will be punished eternally in accordance with his intentions and actions. Some also argue that the fire of Hell has a purifying function, and therefore after one's soul is purified, it must be relieved because God does not punish His servant with the intention of revenge, but His intention is to bring man's soul to perfection. Our response to this criticism is that the purpose of many afflictions that descend on man in this world is to purify his soul.[689]

Another related argument is that Heaven and Hell are both like passages. Paradise is a way station where good deeds of the obedient servant of God who always followed the straight path in the world are entified, and Hell is the road for the rebellious servant who followed the wrong path and where he will remain eternally and all his evil deeds and qualities will

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[688] Qur'an, 3: 182 and 8: 51: *that, for what your hands have forwarded, and for that God is never unjust unto His servants.*

[689] Qur'an, 2: 155:*Surely We will try you with something of fear and hunger, and diminution of goods and lives and fruits; yet give thou good tidings unto the patient who, when they are visited by an affliction, say, "Surely we belong to God, and to Him we return"*; and 2: 214: *Or did you suppose you should enter Paradise without there had come upon you the like of those who passed away before you? They were afflicted by misery and hardship and were so convulsed, that the Messenger and those who believed with him said, "When comes God's help?" Ah, but surely God's help is nigh.*

find entification. The eternality of both of these states is limited, but the final destination is of course *in a sure abode, in the presence of a King Omnipotent.*[690]

If it were destined for Hell to be a permanent station, most human beings would have been condemned to remain there forever because the majority of the people are not conscious; they do what they are not supposed to do and rarely perform duties they are expected to fulfill, and few indeed are thankful among God's servants.[691] If one concludes that the majority of people are condemned to remain in Hell forever and could have no hope for change or transformation and hence no possibility of being saved from that station, such a conclusion denotes the inability of the Creator to forgive or His willingness to revenge: *High indeed be He exalted above that they say!*[692]

There are several other explanations that we might present here in the context of this discussion. First of all, we must bear in mind that believers' good and virtuous deeds are in fact a route toward encountering His Beauty and a straight path toward annihilation in Him. Similarly, evil deeds of disbelievers are a road toward an encounter with God's Majesty and Glory. This is a crooked path marked by a great many ups and downs and extremes until the sinner is annihilated in God's crushing power and domination. It is from then on that Heaven and Hell are no longer way stations but become permanent stations and the world of subsistence in God. In addition the statement of the Qur'an mentioned above (*Surely the godfearing shall dwell amid gardens and a river, in a sure abode, in the presence of a King Omnipotent*) applies only to the destination of the godfearing and the pious servants of God. However, such stations are not granted to all individuals and peoples. Some soul that reached certainty (*nufūs al-muṭma'innah*) are in God's special Paradise, others like those who were brought nigh (*muqarrabūn*) will be sent to the heavens of God's bounties (*Jannāt al-na'īm*), and some others will be in the presence of the Clement

690 Qur'an, 54: 55
691 Qur'an, 34: 13
692 Qur'an, 17: 43

and the Merciful, or in the presence of the Inspirer of Faith (al-Mu'min) and the Savior (al-Salām). Similarly, the inhabitants of Hell are under Names of majesty and power such as the Crusher (al-Qahhār), the Compeller (al-Jabbār), the Severe in Retribution (Shadīd'l-'Iqāb), the Avenger (al-Muntaqim), and the like.

The weak and strong creatures in this universe, including the wretched human beings and the sinners, are all created by God out of His wisdom and prudence. Otherwise, He would have not created them. No being is evil in principle in the engendered realm. The ignorant, the wretched, and the rebellious all symbolize God's creative power, and manifestation of His majesty and power. There is no difference among His creatures, and they are all under His dominance. Creation is perfect and one cannot find flaws and imperfections in it. Each being traverses in its own path under the grace of one Divine Name of Beauty or Majesty until it is annihilated in Him; and each being in its all-inclusive being and identity finds subsistence in God, the Most High, praise belongs to Him. In short, the entire universe indeed is the scene of the interplay of God's Names of Majesty and Beauty, and the inhabitants of Heaven and Hell are manifestation of these Names. Therefore, we should not see Hell as an error or flaw in creation and perceive its inhabitants as a disservice to creation.

If creation that represents the creator is imperfect, it does not matter if it is eternal or is not. How can one accept that a thing can be existentiated by the All-Wise Creator, Who is perfect, yet argue that such a thing can exist in this world and not in the Hereafter? This is logically impossible. The logical conclusion, as we explained before, is that God's eternity is in His Essence and that everything else is an extension of God's eternity. The most convincing reason to prove this argument is indeed that which Hishām ibn Ḥakam presented; that is, since the Hereafter is the abode of detachment, it is the realm of eternity, and everything in there would be free of change or transformation and decay. If the inhabitants of Heaven are not eternal, they must be either subject to change and corruption, and this

is against the rule of the principle of detachment because subsistence follows annihilation. Similarly, if the inhabitants of Hell are not eternal, either they should leave Hell—which contradicts the rule of detachment—or should die, and that is also against the principle of subsistence [in God].

We must also mention that some inhabitants of Hell get a chance to leave that realm and those are the ones whose hearts were not corrupted by sins of polytheism, and evil deeds only corrupted their outward beings. In such cases, after their outward beings are burned and annihilated, what remains of them is heavenly, and therefore, they will go to Heaven through intercession. There are some verses that explain other aspects of *khulūd* that denote the eternal life of disbelievers and the rebellious souls in Hell: *Behold, Gehenna has become an ambush, for the insolent a resort, therein to tarry for ages tasting therein neither coolness nor any drink.*[693]

Our teacher and master, the late 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, translated the term (*ahqāb*, sing. *ḥuqub*) as a very long time and believed that this term was applied to those believers who would eventually be taken out of Hell. A certain Ibn Abī 'Umayr narrated on the authority of Imām Bāqir that this verse pertains to the sinners who would eventually be taken out of Hell.

From the preceding discussion we can conclude safely that only those unbelievers who denied God and the Day of Return as well as those who assign partners to God will remain in Hell forever; Imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim also stated that God does not keep anyone in fire except those who assigned partners to God, and those believers who do not commit cardinal sins will not be questioned on the Day, and those believers who committed

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[693] Qur'an, 78: 21–23. See also 3: 151: *their lodging shall be the Fire; evil is the lodging of the evildoers*; 4: 121: *Such men—their refuge shall be Gehenna, and they shall find no asylum from it*; 22: 22: *as often as they desire in their anguish to come forth from it, they shall be restored into it, and: 'Taste the chastisement of the burning!"*; and 52: 13–16: *bear you patiently, or bear not patiently, equal it is to you; you are only being recompensed for that you were working.*

cardinal sins will be saved through intercession if they are remorseful, repent, and ask for forgiveness. And the Prophet said, "When a believer feels remorse for the sins he committed, this is the same as his repentance. He who is pleased with good deeds and remorseful of evil acts, he is indeed a believer." Thus God would not send a believer to Hell because He has promised Paradise to him, and He does not remove a disbeliever from the fire, because He has condemned him to fire eternally. The sinful among believers may go to Hell but they will be eventually saved through intercession.[694]

According to two prominent commentators on the Qur'an, 'Ayyāshī and Ibrāhīm ibn Furāt, those who will not be allowed to leave Hell are the enemies of 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib and his Household, as the Prophet said, "He who dies and does not know the *imām* of his age dies an ignorant death."[695]

Ibn 'Abbās recorded another *ḥadīth* where the Prophet stated, "By the One who appointed me as the bringer of glad tidings (*Bashīr*), God will never keep a believer in fire eternally. They will all ask for intercession and it will be accepted from them."

He then added,

> On the Day of Judgment, God will command the evil-doers and the sinner to go to Hell. They will ask God, "O Lord! How would You send us to fire while we worshiped You alone in the world, or burn our tongue and heart while they gave testimony to Your Oneness? How would You burn our faces while we prostrated before You, and burn our hands while we raised them in prayer?"
>
> God will respond: "O My servants! You committed evil acts and sins in the world and Hell is your punishment."
>
> And people will say, "O Lord! Are our sins bigger than Your mercy and forgiveness?"

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[694] 'Ali ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā, *Uyūn al-Akhbār*, as quoted in Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. VIII, pp. 359–62.
[695] 'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. I p. 73, and 'Ali ibn Ibrāhīm, *Tafsīr Furāt*, p. 208

God will respond, "My forgiveness and mercy is bigger than your sins."

People will ask, "O Lord! Is our testimony to Your Oneness bigger than our sins?"

And God will say, "Indeed your testimony is more important than your sins."

People will then ask God if His mercy and forgiveness *that encompasses everything* will be extended to them.

God, Majestic and Glorious is He, will respond, "By my Majesty and Glory I have not created a thing that is more loved by Me than the servant who gives testimony to My Oneness and that there is no God but Me. And I have committed Myself that I would not send those who gave testimony to My Oneness to Hell. O My angels! Take these servants to Heaven."

To Him belongs all Praise; He who guided us to this undertaking. We would have not been guided to this had it not been for God's guidance. O Lord! Send greeting to our Prophet Muhammad and his immaculate progeny, and may Your curse be upon their enemies till the Day of Judgment.

* * *

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INDEX OF *AḤĀDĪTH*

a. *Aḥādīth Qudsī*

He who seeks Me finds Me, He who finds Me knows Me, he who knows Me loves Me, and he who loves Me falls in love with Me, and he who falls in love with Me I fall in love with him. And he whom I fall in love with, I kill, and whom I kill his blood money is on Me, and I am his blood money.

I act neither tyrannically nor unjustly, and do not make any adhere to anything but that which I knew of him before I created him.

b. *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet

The Prophet, peace be upon him and his progeny, came upon a barren land with his companions. He said to his companions: "Fetch some wood." They responded, "O Messenger, we are in a barren land. There is no wood here." He said, "Then let each man bring what he can." Every man brought something, until some began to bring to him whatever they could find. The Messenger then said, "Sins are also gathered in this way. Be forewarned of the sins that make you reviled. For indeed all things are coveted and indeed each person that covets will record that which they presented and that which is an effect (of what you presented). For indeed "everything we have numbered in a clear register."

People enter and exit the fire in consideration with their deeds; the first group as fast as lightning, others like the wind, some others like a running horse, then like a rider, then like a running person, then like a man on foot.

Abū Bakr heard it directly from the Prophet who said, "No one can pass through the Bridge without Ali's permission."

'Ali is the criterion who defines who will go to Heaven and who will go to Hell. (recorded in both Sunni and Shī'a collections)

Loving Ali is a virtue and disliking him is a vice.

The prayer is a scale; whoever fulfills the commitment to it, it will fulfill the commitment in return.

There is no way shorter to leave Islam than leaving the obligatory prayer intentionally or not taking seriously the performance of it.

Love for me and my progeny will be helpful on seven stations where there is great fear and trepidation. Those stations are the moment of death, on entering the grave, on the Day of Resurrection, on the occasion of seeing one's book of deeds, on the moment of reckoning, and in passing over the Bridge.

On the Resurrection Day nothing can make an individual's scale heavier than a good manner and attitude.

One stroke by 'Ali on the day of [the battle of] Khandaq is more precious than worship of man and jinn.

If the world were in God's opinion worth even as much as a mosquito's wing, He would have not allowed the disbeliever to drink even a sip of it.

Every person who receives a very exacting reckoning, that is his punishment.

I swear by the One who has my life in His Hands, for the believer that Day will pass quickly. It will be for him the length of one canonical prayer that he did in this world, and maybe even quicker.

O you group of Qur'an reciters. Fear God—Glorious and Majestic is He—with that which He has burdened you through His book. For I will be questioned, and you will also be questioned. I will be questioned about my proclamation. As for you, you will be asked about what you were burdened with through my Lord's book and my wont.

God, Exalted and Mighty is He, will reckon and try all of His creatures, except the person who commits shirk against God, Exalted and Mighty is He. And this person will not be reckoned, and He will be banished to the Hell-fire.

Inwardly, I have such exalted states with God that no angel brought nigh and no messenger sent down can experience.

He addressed me from my inner being, by discovering my secrets. Then He said, "Do you know who I Am?" I said, "My ultimate dream." I then became annihilated in eternal subsistence in Him, in His Essence, which is permanent and eternal.

Every blessing will be asked about on the Day of Judgment, except that which is spent in the path of God, the Exalted.

There are three things that a servant will not be asked about: the rag that he uses to cover his privates, a broken piece of

bread that he uses to stop his hunger, and the house that shelters him from the elements (lit. the heat and the cold).

The possessors for all blessings will be interrogated, except for those in battle or on *ḥajj*.

My intercession is for those among my community who have committed the gravest sins.

My intercession for my community is for those who love my progeny (Ahl al-Bayt).

Do not take lightly the Shī'a of 'Ali. For the man who is among them will intercede for as many people as the number of Rabī'ah and Muḍar.

God revealed unto 'Īsā, peace be upon him, "O 'Īsā believe in Muhammad. And command whoever among your people who meet him to also believe in him. For if it was not for Muhammad, I would not have created Adam. And if it was not for Muhammad, I would not have created Heaven and Hell. When I created the (Divine) Throne upon Water, it would shake and tremble; thus I inscribed upon it, 'There is no deity but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God.' Then it became peaceful and calm."

Any woman who prays the five canonical prays throughout the day and night, and fasts during Ramaḍān, and completes the pilgrimage to the House of God, and gives the ritual charity (*zakāt*), and obeys her husband, and accepts the *wilāyah* of Imām 'Ali after me, this woman will enter Heaven because of Fāṭimah's intercession on her behalf. She is the master of all the women of the worlds.

No intercessor saves [a person] more than [his] repentance. Intercession is through the prophets and their legatees, the believers and the angels. Among the believers are those who will intercede for as many people as the tribes of Rabī'ah and Muḍar. And the least of the believers will intercede for as many as 30 people. Intercession is not for those who doubt and attribute partners [unto God], nor is it for those who disbelieve and deny; rather it is for the believers, the People of *Tawḥīd*

Jibra'īl came to me and said, "Shall I announce to you the means by which you will traverse the Bridge (*Ṣirāṭ*)?" I said, "But, of course!" He said, "You will traverse it with the light of God, and 'Ali will traverse it with your light, while your light is from God's light. And your *umma* will traverse it with 'Ali's light, while 'Ali's light is from your light. He whom God did not give 'Ali's light, he will have no light."

Oh 'Ali, you are the first (person) to enter Paradise, all while you will be carrying my banner. It is the Banner of Praise, a banner with 70 pieces, with each piece being larger than the sun and the moon.

We, the Prophets, have been commanded to speak to people in accordance with the level of their intellects.

Whoever does not believe in my Fount, God will not permit him to come to the Fount [on the Day of Judgment].

O 'Ali, you will come to me at the Fount while your Shī'a will be fully satiated, and while your enemies will come to you, thirsty and shackled.

O 'Ali! Verily you and your legatees after you are like *A'arāf* between Heaven and Hell. Nobody will enter Paradise except him who recognizes you and whom you recognize, and nobody will enter Hell except him who does not know you and you do not know him.

The Prophet was asked about *ṭūbā*. He said, "It is a tree whose origin is in my house and each branch of it is in the house of a believer." Then somebody asked him one more time and he said, "In the house of 'Ali." When they asked him why his two responses to the same question were different he said, "My house and 'Ali's are one in paradise in the same location."

Once I entered Paradise and saw at its gate written with gold "There is no god but God, Muhammad is His beloved, and 'Ali is His Friend, Fāṭimah is His servant, Ḥassan and Ḥusayn are God's pure and chosen servants."

Indeed, God, Most High, placed a column made of red ruby upon which it is built seventy thousand palaces and in each palace there are seventy thousand rooms and pavilions. God created these for those who are kind to each other for God's sake and their hearts meet in God.

Indeed, generosity is a tree among many trees of Paradise. It branches are extended to the world. He who is generous clings on one of those branches of the tree that will connect him to Paradise. Similarly, jealousy and stinginess is a tree among the trees of Hell. He who is stingy and jealous clings on one of those branches of the tree that will connect him to Hell.

All deeds are by their intentions. And for each man is what he intends. So whosoever journeys towards God and His

Prophet, then His journey is towards God and His Prophet. And whosoever journeys towards the world, while he desires it, or towards a woman that he may marry, his journey will be towards that which he intends.

Indeed, I reserved my intercession for those among my *umma* who have committed grave sins. As for the good, nothing is held against them.

Lady Fāṭimah, peace be upon her, said to the Prophet, may the Blessings of Allah be upon him and his family: "O dear Father! Where shall I meet you on the Day of Judgment, the Day of the Greatest Station (*al-Mawqif al-A'ẓām*), that Day of Fright and Terror (*ahwāl wa'l faza'*)?"

He said, "Fāṭimah! Meet me by the Gates of Heaven, while I raise the flag of Praise (of God), and I will be interceding for my people to my Lord."

She responded, "Dear father, and what if I do not meet you there?"

He said, "Then meet me upon the Path (*al-Ṣirāṭ*), while I will be standing, saying, 'Oh my Lord, deliver my people.'"

She said, "And if I do not meet you there?"

He replied, "Meet me at the edge of Hell, where I will prevent its sparks and flames from burning my people."

Narrations of Shī'a Imāms

Imam 'Ali

Abu Dharr [Ghifārī] has narrated, "Once I was traveling in the wake of the Commander of the Faithful when we came upon a valley. And in this valley were a sea of ants moving about. I was in utter awe of this sight. I exclaimed, 'God is

great! How magnificent He must be to be able to enumerate even this sea of ants.' Imām 'Ali, peace be upon him, replied, 'Do not say that; rather say, 'God is magnificent for creating it.' For by He who has created you, if God permits, I can enumerate them, and can even tell you of the number of male and female ants among them."

"I ('Ammār) was with Imām 'Ali during a war campaign, when we passed by a large valley filled with ants. I exclaimed, 'O Commander of the Faithful. Do you know of any among God's creation who knows how many ants there are here?' He replied, 'Yes, O 'Ammār! I know a man who knows not only their number, but how many male and female ants there are here.' I responded, 'O Master, who is that man?' He said, 'O 'Ammār! Have you not read in Surah Yāsīn (36) where it states that "All things are enumerated in the clear register?" I said, 'Yes, of course.' He replied, 'I am that clear register.'"

Forgive [me] for every evil action that You commanded the two noble scribes to confirm whom You have appointed to record all my deeds and You appointed them as witnesses over me along with the limbs of my body, while You observed over me besides them and You witnessed those deeds that You concealed from them...

One day, the Commander of Faithful wished to eat a liver kabob and bread. For one year he resisted the temptation and did not share it with anyone. One day while he was fasting he shared his desire with [his son] Ḥassan. When the time came for him to break his fast a beggar came to him. He asked Ḥassan to give the food to the beggar, saying, "lest on the Day of Judgment we read in our book of deeds that we dissipated by consuming good food and enjoyed them."

There are formidable valleys and frightening stations before your steps ahead, which inevitably you have to arrive in and go through. Either God's grace will save you or you will fall down and be destroyed without having any choice.

All good as well as evil deeds will be weighed. The good deeds will make the scale heavy and the evil deeds make them light.

Ali was asked, "How will Allah reckon the deeds of his creation, in all their plentitude?"

He replied, "Just as He gave them their sustenance in all their plentitude."

Then he was asked, "How will He reckon when they do not see Him?"

He responded, "Just as He gave them their sustenance while they do not see Him."

When God appears to his obedient worshipers, He will give them glad tidings, and will say, "I swear by My Glory and Majesty, the injustice of an oppressor will not pass Me by, even if it is a palm with a palm, or the wiping of a palm, or the smiting of a ram a hornless ewe." He will retaliate for His servants, some of them for others, until no instance of injustice that an individual has perpetrated against another remain. Then God will send them to be reckoned.

From the first until the last of humankind, there will be none on the Day of Judgment but that he will be in dire need of Muhammad's intercession.

Indeed, my intercession is for those among my *umma* who have committed grave sins. As for the good, nothing is held against them.

He who assumes that God commands man to do evil or commit sins, he attributes dishonesty and lies to Him; he who thinks that good or evil take place outside of God's will and ordinance, negates His kingly power; he who assumes that sins are committed without God's power, accuses Him of lying; and he who assumes so, his abode will be fire.

Description of Hell is also provided by Imām 'Ali. According him, "....its depth is endless, its heat unbearable, its drinks are polluted and hot, its torture constantly renewed, its clubs are made of rough iron, its torture never decreases or ends, its inhabitants never die. It is an abode where there is no kindness and mercy, and never any request of its inhabitants are heard or responded."

Imām Ḥusayn

Someone asked Imām Ḥusayn who is there that shall intercede before God with His leave, He who knows what is behind them and in front of them and what He created. The Imām responded, "We are those who interceded; we are the Foremost."

Imām Sajjād

O servants of God! You must be aware that [on the Resurrection Day] the scales will not be put or the records be released to the polytheists; they will go toward Hell in group. The scales will be put and the records will be released to people who surrendered. O servants of God! Fear God.

[On the Day of Judgment] man becomes aware of all his good or evil deeds, that which he sent [before death] and that which he sent [after death]. And "his latter deeds" are those which he left as a tradition that those who come after him continue as their tradition. If they were evil deeds, it will be [an additional] burden [for him], and nothing will be reduced from his burden. And if they were good deeds, he will be rewarded to an equal amount, and nothing will be reduced from his reward.

There are no witnesses upon the people except for the Imāms and God's messengers. As for the Muslim *umma* it would not be appropriate for God to ask for their testimonies, when among them are scattered many whose testimonies in this world would not be accepted, even in cases where the stakes are a small handful of grains. How can a person who cannot be trusted when he testifies about a bag of produce, be trusted to testify on the Day of Judgment against a great many people?

When the night falls, it calls out in a voice loud enough for all mankind to hear, and all heed it except for the two precious things (*thaqalayn*, i.e. the Ahl al-Bayt). "O son of Adam, I am a witness for all who live this night. So prosper and do good through me, for when the sun rises, you cannot commit any more good deeds nor perpetrate any more evil through me. And when the night does leave, the day calls out the same message.

O Sa'd! learn the Qur'an, for on the Day of Judgment, it will come in the form of the most beautiful person anyone has ever seen. All of humankind will be ordered in 120,000 rows;

80,000 will be from the community of Muhammad; and the remaining 40,000 will be from all the other communities [that ever existed].

There is no man, from the first people until the end, who is not in need of the intercession of Muhammad on the Day of Judgment. Indeed the Prophet has permission to intercede for his community, and it is incumbent upon us to intercede on behalf of our follower (*shi'atanā*), and for our followers' intercession on behalf of their people, and indeed for all believers to intercede on behalf of as many people as the population of the Rabī'ah and Muḍar tribes.

When Imām Bāqir was asked to comment on the following verse, Truly, to Us is their return; then upon Us shall rest their reckoning, he replied, "On the day of Judgment, God will charge us with the reckoning of our Shī'ites. Whatsoever of God's that we ask Him to bestow us with, will also be bestowed upon them; whatsoever [good] those who oppose them possess, they will also possess; and whatsoever [good] we possess, they will also possess." Then he added, "They accompany us wherever we may be."

If you want to know whether there is any good in you, then look into your heart. If you find that you love those who obey God and despise those who disobey Him, then there is good in you and God loves you. If you despise those who obey Him and you love those who disobey Him, then there is evil in you and God despises you. Man is associated with whomever he loves.

By God, if a piece of rock loved us and was devoted to us, God would resurrect him with us. Is religion aught but love?

Imām Ṣādiq

When the Judgment Day arrives, every person's book will open and he will be told to 'Read!'"

The narrator said, "I asked, "And does he know what is within that book?"

The Imām replied, "Indeed God will remind him. For there is no moment nor word, no movement of feet, nor thing committed except that he will remember, as though he had committed (that act) in that very moment. And therefore they say, 'Alas for us! How is it with this Book, that it leaves nothing behind, small or great, but it has numbered it.'"

The deeds of all people are presented to the Prophet every morning and night. These are the deeds of both the good and the evil. So beware! For each one of you will have his evil deeds seen by the prophets.

Each new day that comes will tell the person living in it, "O son of Adam, I am a new day. I witness what you do. Do good through me, and act good while you live this day. I will testify to your deeds on the Day of Judgment. Thereafter you will never see me again until then."

If a servant of God truly and sincerely repents in the way God loves, He will conceal that evil deed from him in this world and the Hereafter. I asked, "How will He conceal that deed from him?" He replied, "He will cause the two angelic scribes to forget the deed they had recorded. He will secretly command the servant's body to hide his deed from him. And he will command that piece of land upon which he committed the act, 'Hide whatever evil he has committed upon you.' And

when he faces God, on that Day, none will bring forth even a hint of the evil he committed."

"Do you know what that [Black Stone] used to be?" I said no. He said, "It was among the great angels of God, the Glorious and Majestic. When God made the covenant with the angels, he was first among the angels to profess belief and accept the covenant; and so God made him His trustee among creation. God then made him swallow the covenant and called him toward Himself."

Whoever denies three things is not of our Shī'a: the night ascension, the interrogation in the grave, and intercession.

And there were none more devoted to Muhammad and his family than that angel. Thus, God distinguished him from among all the other angels, and made him swallow the covenant, such that on the Day of Judgment, he will have a powerful voice, and an insightful vision. He will testify in favor of all those who abide by his right... and who held strong to the covenant.

The narrator said, to Imām Ṣādiq, "I dislike praying in non-Shī'ī mosques."

The Imām replied, "Nay, you should enjoy visiting even those places. All mosques are built either on the grave of a prophet, or the martyred legatees of a prophet. A drop of their blood has spilled on that land. Because of this, God loves to be remembered in that land. So perform your canonical and supererogatory prayers in that space, and compensate for whatever prayers you have not done therein.

Heed the Qur'an. Learn from it and study it closely. Some learn the Qur'an so that other will declare, "He is a great chanter." While others may learn to attain a beautiful voice, such that others will say, "He has such a beautiful voice." While yet others learn the Qur'an, and uphold it day and night, and care not who knows of how they adhere to it.

The [outward] form of human soul is the straight path toward all goods. It is a bridge between Paradise and fire.

"Deeds are not material and corporal things to be weighed or measured. What will be measured is man's motivation and his intention behind his deed. One weighs something when one is not aware of its weight. God knows everything and need not weigh man's deed."

Then people asked him what scale means in this context, and he replied, "justice." He was then asked what the Qur'anic verse means when it says, ...he whose scales are heavy... He said, "These are the people whose deed is closer to justice. In other words, whoever's deed is closer to justice, his scale will be heavier and whoever's deed is far from justice his scale will be lighter."

Imām Ṣādiq explains God's Words in the following verse, *And dread the evil reckoning...* He said, "It is a very exacting investigation and scrutiny. Their sins will count against them while their good works will not count for them."

If the reckoning on that Day was done by any other than God, each person would wait 50,000 years or more, and even then it would not be completed. However, with God's reckoning, it will be completed in less than a moment.

When ‘Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn [Imām Sajjād] would rise for prayer, he would become as steady as the trunk of a tree. He would not move but would only sway with the wind. [The color of] his face would change. When he prostrated, he would not lift his head until he began sweating profusely.

When the Day of Judgment arrives, God—Glorious and Majestic is He—gathers all His creatures round, and the first person to be called to trial will be Prophet Noah. He will be asked, “Did you proclaim your message?” He will say, “Yes.” He will then be asked, “Who will corroborate your claim?” He will respond, “Muhammad ibn ‘Abdullah, blessings upon him…” And then the Prophet will call Ja‘far and Ḥamzah to go and testify on his behalf.

Whoever recites the name of God over his food will not be asked about the blessing of that food.

On the Day of Judgment, God will resurrect people according to their intentions.

By God, I do not fear for you except when it comes to the barzakh. As for when we have the command, then we have authority over you.

Whoever denies the truth of three things is not one of our Shī‘ah: the heavenly ascension of the Prophet (*mi‘rāj*), the questioning in the grave (*al-musalata’*), and intercession.

He who is longing to enter Paradise recites chapter 56 (“*al-Wāqi’a*h”), and he who likes to learn about characteristics of Hell-fire should read chapter 32 (“*Sajdah*”).

Between compelling man to commit sins and entrusting his affairs fully to him, there is a third and very subtle alternative, and it is indeed God's special favor to human beings; and that is, "Neither predestination nor free will, but an affair between the two (*lā jabra wa lā tafwīḍ bal amra bayn al-amrayn*)."

Imām Riḍā

Whenever human beings originate a sin they had not previously known, God originates for them a calamity they had not previously recognized.

None receive that intercession except those whose devotion God is pleased with.

Yūnis ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān narrates that Imām Riḍa said, "O Yūnis! Do not speak like [the Qadarīyah] for their words are not the words of the people of Paradise, or Hell, or Satan. Because the people of Paradise recite, "Praise belongs to God, who guided us unto this; had God not guided us, we had surely never been guided"; and the inhabitants of Hell shall say, "Our Lord, our adversity prevailed over us; we were an erring people. Our Lord, bring us forth out of it"; and does not Satan say, "My Lord, for Thy perverting me I shall deck all fair to them in the earth, and I shall pervert them, all together."

Imām 'Ali al-Naqī narrates a *ḥadīth* from his forefathers extending back to Imām 'Ali, who stated: "I (once) heard the Prophet saying: 'When humanity is gathered on the Day of Judgment, a caller will proclaim to me, "Oh Prophet of God! God, may His Name be Exalted, has allowed you to reward those who love you and those who love your family, who befriend them for your sake, and who despise [their enemies] for

your sake. So suffice them with what you will!" And I will say, "Oh Lord of Paradise! Have them reside wherever I will. For such is the praised status that I have been promised.'""

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